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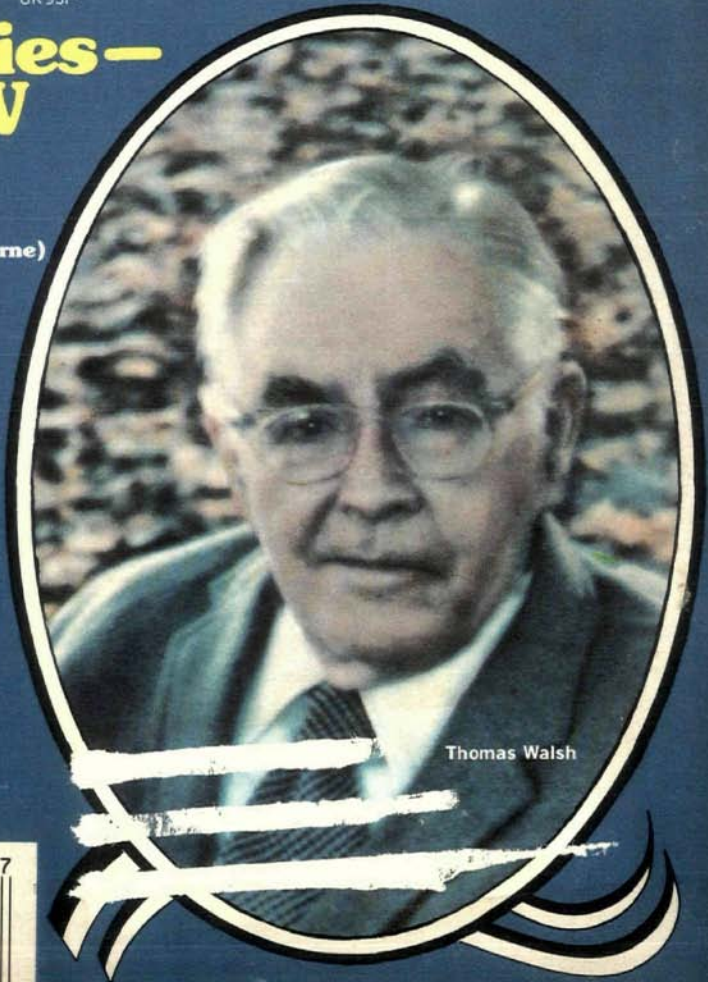

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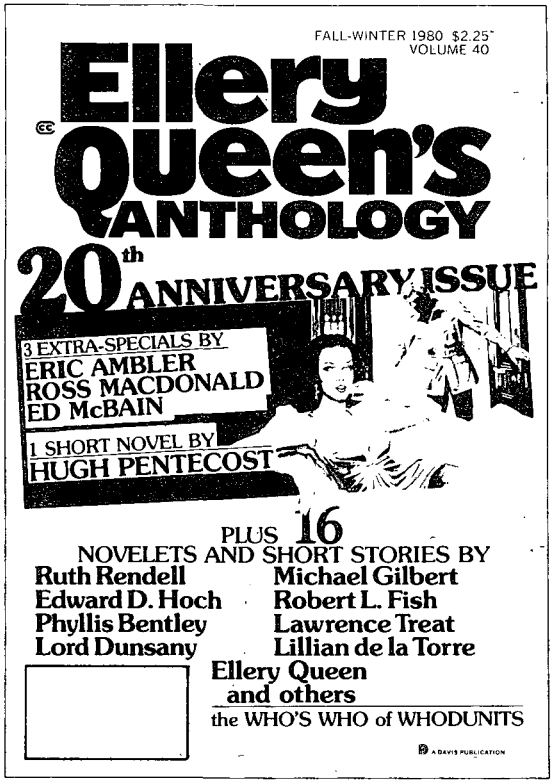


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# MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

***by JACK RITCHIE***

The fingerprint and medical people were still busy in the living room, so I wandered through the apartment again. In the bedroom I re-studied the empty jewel case on the vanity table and the rifled purse.

The burglar-murderer had left behind three uncashed paychecks made out in the name of Linda Baumgartner by Zander Plumbing Supplies, Inc.

I moved on to the kitchenette and peered into the refrigerator. I was examining cupboard contents when Ralph came into the room.

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"Henry, they took the body away. It's now safe to come into the living room."

I regarded him coldly. "Ralph, I have seen dead bodies before. I have never shirked my ocular duty. I simply do not revel in it."

The victim had been one Linda Baumgartner, age 24. She appeared to have been fatally struck over the head with a ceramic piggy bank well stocked with Susan B. Anthony dollars. The act of the murder had broken the bank and scattered the coins about the living room.

Miss Baumgartner's body had been attired in a white blouse, black slacks, and mules. Near her body lay a nearly full, plastic bottle of laundry detergent and a pyrex measuring cup.

"Well, Henry," Ralph said. "What do you make of this?"

"Ralph, let me reconstruct the crime, from pizza to pizza, so to speak. The time was approximately eight thirty and Miss Baumgartner experienced hunger pains. She phoned Herrmann's Pizza Palace and ordered one of his concoctions.

"Knowing that pizzas are seldom delivered pronto, she felt that she had time enough to take a basket of laundry down to the basement washing machine. She took the elevator with her basket, the laundry, the bottle of detergent, and the measuring cup.

"While she was gone, our intruder appeared. I imagine that it is his *modus operandi* to go about ringing apartment doorbells. If someone answers, he makes some excuse, possibly claiming to have the wrong apartment. However, if no one answers, he assumes with fair accuracy that no one is home. He then produces his ring of versatile keys and makes an entry. If he is a man after readily pocketable items—that is, cash and jewelry, eschewing heavier and bulkier typewriters, TV sets, and food processors—a knowledgeable burglar can sweep through an apartment in a matter of minutes.

"Meanwhile, downstairs in the basement laundry, Miss Baumgartner put her wash into the machine, measured and poured the detergent, and inserted the necessary coinage to permit the machine's wash cycle to commence. She then returned to her fourth-floor apartment, carrying the bottle of detergent and the measuring cup, but leaving behind the battered, disintegrating, plastic laundry basket."

"Hold it, Henry. What makes you so positive that this laundry basket which you haven't seen is battered, disintegrating, and plastic?"

I smiled. "Ralph, in these days of the malleable molecule, *wicker*

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laundry baskets are difficult to find. Rare prizes. Almost extinct. If one possesses such a treasure, battered or not, one does not leave that item in a public laundry room where it might be stolen in one's absence. And if this laundry basket were still new, though plastic, one would also bring it back to the apartment for the same reason. But since there is no laundry basket of any description in this apartment, we must conclude that Miss Baumgartner's laundry basket was worn, battered, and disintegrating plastic. It was a bother to carry it up and down again from her apartment, so she simply left it there. If it is stolen, so what?"

"That's downright brilliant, Henry."

I nodded. "And so returning to her apartment, she surprised the burglar, possibly in the act of stuffing the piggy bank into his zipper bag. In a panic he struck Miss Baumgartner with that item, the bank, and fled from the apartment, in the process almost bowling over the man who had come to deliver the pizza."

Ralph and I went back into the living room. The fingerprint men were still at it, though I doubted that they would come up with anything, since our burglar had been described as wearing gloves.

The pizza in question, still in its cardboard, heat-retaining carton, now reposed on a side table. The pizza delivery man, attired in a white uniform and a natty overseas cap, was large-eyed and doubtless awed by police procedure.

I attempted to put him at his ease.

"What kind of pizza is it?"

He looked at the object in question. "A deli. Sausage, green peppers, olives, mushrooms, onions, anchovies. The works."

I thought about that for a moment. Was there anything significant in that, and if so, what?

"Can you tell us what happened again?" I asked. "I realize that you have given us your story several times before, but we detectives like to go over testimony again and again, always on the alert for any discrepancies."

He shrugged. "Sure. Well, there's not really too much. I came out of the elevator with the pizza when this character comes rushing out of the apartment, leaving the door open. He almost knocks me over and then he rushed down the fire stairs. I guess that after what he'd just done, he didn't want to wait for anything as slow as an elevator."

I agreed.

"Well, I saw this lady lying on the floor and all that blood. So I

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rushed downstairs to the superintendent's apartment and told them it's murder."

The superintendent and his wife had been introduced as Mr. and Mrs. Franklin. He was small, bald, and had neutrally blue eyes. She was firm-jawed, several inches taller, heavier, and obviously would be their spokesperson.

I turned back to the delivery man. "And once again, can you describe this man?"

"He was about average height and weight. He had a lot of hair, a big nose, and a heavy mustache. He was carrying a zipper bag and he wore gloves. I noticed the gloves because it's summer and who wears gloves?"

"You have a keen eye, my good man," I said.

He blushed a bit. "I've been thinking about joining the force. There isn't too much future delivering pizzas."

There was that word again. Pizza. I pondered. Ah, at last I had it! I took Ralph back into the kitchen and lowered my voice. "Ralph, there is more here than meets the eye."

"More what?"

I opened the refrigerator. "Ralph, what do you see in there?"

He looked at me first and then peered. "A jar of mayonnaise, half a head of lettuce, three radishes on a saucer, a dozen eggs, margarine, four oranges, a bunch of celery."

I opened the freezer compartment. "And in here?"

"Couple of cans of concentrated frozen orange juice, package of frozen cauliflower, package of frozen strawberries—"

I held up a cease-and-desist hand. "Ralph, what do you *not* see in either the refrigerator proper or in the freezer compartment?"

He looked again. "What don't I see?"

I gave him another chance by opening one of the cupboards. "What do you observe in here?"

He sighed. "Two cans of cherry-pie filler, one of blueberry. Two large cans of tomato juice. Two cans of pineapple slices, and about a dozen cans of soup."

"Ah, but what *kinds* of soup?"

He checked. "Cream of Mushroom, Cream of Asparagus, Green Pea."

I smiled. "Why is there no Chicken Noodle?"

He stared at the cans. "All right, Henry, why is there no Chicken Noodle?"

"Because it has chicken in it."

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Ralph waited, somehow dangerously.

"Ralph, did you not notice that there is not one single bit of *meat* in the refrigerator? No cold cuts, no steaks, no lamb chops, no hamburger. And in the canned goods collection there is not one can which harbors a scrap of meat. And I defy you to find a typical American household boasting a dozen cans of soup which does not include at least one Chicken Noodle."

Ralph still did not comprehend my point.

"Ralph, our murder victim, Miss Baumgartner, is, or more correctly, was, a *vegetarian.*"

Ralph pondered skeptically. "I saw a carton of eggs in the refrigerator. I thought vegetarians don't eat eggs."

"Ralph, most people regard vegetarianism as a monolith. However, it is not. There are those vegetarians who eat dairy products and there are those who do not. There are those who consume fish, and those who do not. And there are those who eat eggs and those who do not."

"Gosh," Ralph said.

I nodded wisely. "I have an uncle who is a purist. He has such a terrific reverence for life that he will not eat even a lettuce leaf unless it has died a natural death."

"All right," Ralph said, "so the victim was a vegetarian. What the hell has that got to do with the murder?"

"Ralph," I said somberly, "it is the very crux of our case. Why would a vegetarian order a pizza which contains meat, namely sausage?"

"I give up. Why?"

"The answer is that she *wouldn't.*"

"Then who ordered the damn pizza?"

"Her murderer, Ralph. And it is the one mistake he made. He either did not *know,* or was not *told,* that his victim was a vegetarian, and this will prove his undoing."

Ralph has lately developed the habit of closing his eyes for moments at a time. "Henry, why the hell would the murderer want to order a pizza?"

"To establish the *time* of the murder. Does it not strike you as a shaky coincidence that our murderer should leap out of the apartment at the very moment that the pizza man has come to make his delivery? And does not his described physiognomy—bushy hair, large nose, and heavy mustache—shout of *disguise?*"

I waited for Ralph to absorb this and then continued, "Ralph, our

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murderer killed Miss Baumgartner and then calmly went through the process of making it appear as though it had been the work of a burglar caught by surprise. That done, he phoned for a pizza. He waited at the slightly opened door until he saw the pizza man leave the elevator and approach. Then he rushed out of the apartment, thoughtfully leaving the door open behind him, and theatrically bumped into the pizza man to gain his attention."

"Why would this murderer want to go through all that trouble?"

"To establish the time of the murder."

"You said that once before, Henry. Why would he want to establish the time of the murder?"

"Because he was a *hired* killer."

"Oh, Lord," Ralph said.

"Ralph, did you not notice that our burglar-murderer left behind three of Miss Baumgartner's *uncashed* paychecks?"

"Why not? They were useless to him. How could he cash them?"

"Ralph," I said, "look about you. This is a rather spacious apartment in a relatively plush middle-class neighborhood. Do you think that a woman who appears to have had a job paying barely above the minimum wage would be able to *afford* living in a place like this? And not only afford it, but so much so that she does not even bother to cash her paychecks until they accumulate sufficiently so as to make the trouble worthwhile?"

"Okay, Henry. So somebody pays her rent and more. What's all this got to do with the murder?"

"It is the old, old story, Ralph. I do not, as yet, know the exact motive. Perhaps he tired of her and was about to cast her off, but she refused to be cast. Or possibly she had decided to blackmail him. Or always had. But whatever the reason, he determined that the time had come to get rid of her. Permanently. Therefore he hired a professional killer to do the job."

I led Ralph back into the living room and now approached the superintendent and his wife. I introduced myself. "Detective Sergeant Henry Turnbuckle. MPD." I lowered my voice so as to soften the blow. "Madam, are you aware that this murder victim, this Miss Baumgartner, was a *kept* woman?"

Mrs. Franklin folded her rather massive arms. "Mister, half the women in this place are kept. And I could point out a few men too."

"Madam," I said, wondering, "how long has Miss Baumgartner occupied this apartment?"

"About two years."

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"What can you tell me about her?"

She shrugged. "She was the real friendly type. Whenever she heard me vacuuming the hall runner, she'd open the door and come out to talk. She used to be real lonely and die to have someone to talk to."

I seized three words. "Used to be?"

Mrs. Franklin nodded. "She'd even come downstairs to our apartment on some excuse or other just to talk for a while. Finally I said why didn't she just get a job. And she said she didn't have to get a job because she was independently provided for. And I said I don't mean a job for the money, but just so you can get out and meet people instead of just sitting in the apartment all day waiting for weekends. So she got this job with Zander Plumbing. She was a parts clerk. She said the pay was awful, but the people she worked with were friendly."

Mrs. Franklin wiped at a small teardrop. "I guess I was probably the last person to see her alive—besides the murderer, of course. She came downstairs to get change—quarters for the washing machine—and we talked a little. I told her she ought to get herself a new laundry basket because hers was falling apart and she said that she was holding out for wicker, but they were hard to find and they cost an arm and a leg. And then she went downstairs and that was the last time I saw her alive."

"Madam," I said, "during the course of these conversations with you, did she perhaps mention the name of her benefactor? Or benefactors?"

She nodded. "His name was Smith."

"Ah," I said. "And perhaps she mentioned a first name?"

"She called him Johnny."

I rubbed my hands. "Now we are getting somewhere."

Ralph closed his eyes again.

"Madam," I said, "during the course of these two years here, did she mention any other name? Was there anyone else besides John Smith?"

"She didn't fool around. There was just Johnny."

"And what did Johnny Smith look like?"

"He was a little on the elderly side. I mean in good shape and all, but about fifty and gray at the temples. Good dresser and he had a big car."

"Well, Ralph," I said. "We have our man. The instigator of the murder."

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Ralph sighed. "John Smith?"

I chuckled. "Ralph, you are living in another time, another decade. In this more sophisticated day, no one would even *think* of assuming any name like John Smith as an alias. It just isn't done. Therefore I think we must face the fact that John Smith actually *is* the name of our man."

Ralph rubbed the back of his neck, another habit.

"Ralph, if our Miss Baumgartner was intimately acquainted with John Smith and doubted his name, would she not at least have had some curiosity? Would she not in two years have managed to get a peek at his driver's license? When he was asleep, of course. And surely, discovering his true identity, would she not have accidentally let that information—or possibly the name itself—slip out in her many conversations with Mrs. Franklin? Or would she not at least have slyly hinted that she was well aware that John Smith was not his true name?"

Ralph rubbed the back of his neck. He searched for and found the white-pages volume of the phone book. He paged to the Smiths, zeroing in on the Johns. He appeared to count and then looked up. "Thirty-six John Smiths. That still gives us a big job trying to find him."

I smiled tolerantly. "Ralph, you are not thinking. Miss Baumgartner was a kept woman. And *keeping* a woman can be more expensive than keeping a wife, can it not?"

Ralph shrugged. "I wouldn't know. So I look at the addresses behind the John Smiths and toss out those who live in crummy neighborhoods?"

"That is the negative approach, Ralph. And besides, one cannot be expected to know all the street names in the crummy neighborhoods of a city this size. No, Ralph, look for the *good* addresses, or more specifically, those addresses which are in our more *affluent* suburbs."

Ralph ran a finger down the column. "West Allis? No. Greenfield? No. Bay View? No." He stopped and looked up. "Fox Point?"

*"Voila!"* I exclaimed aptly.

I sat down at the phone. "I believe I shall give this John Smith a tentative exploratory phone call. A butler will undoubtedly answer."

"A butler?"

"Certainly, Ralph. People who live in Fox Point can afford butlers."

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"Don't butlers have eight-hour days? This is almost ten at night."

"He would be on duty because of the party."

"What party?"

"Ralph, if you are going to have a murder committed for you and you want an absolutely ironclad alibi for the time of the victim's death, what better method could you choose than to have a party at your home? Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of people would be available to swear that you never left the house." I dialed. "Either it's a party, or, if our man shies at the expense, a card game. An intimate card game with a trio of blue-ribbon citizens. The game would be bridge."

The phone at the other end of the line rang. I held the receiver several inches from my ear so that Ralph could be privy to the conversation.

A woman answered.

I frowned. "What happened to the butler?"

"What butler?"

"Ah, you are the housekeeper?"

"What housekeeper?"

"Madam," I said, "this *is* Fox Point, is it not?"

"Right, sonny."

I chuckled. "How's the party going?"

"What party?"

I persisted. "All right. How's the card game? Who's winning?"

"What card game?"

"Madam," I said stiffly, "just what *is* Mr. Smith doing at this moment?"

"He's asleep."

I blinked. "This early? Alone?"

"Of course alone. What do you expect from a man who's ninety-two? One of Charlie's angels?"

"Who is this speaking?" I demanded.

"Belinda. His daughter. Look, sonny, if this is going to be an obscene phone call, get on with the nitty-gritty. I may be sixty-eight, but I've still got a twinkle in my eye."

I hung up. "Ralph, there is something grossly awry here."

"Awry?"

"Wrong."

The pizza delivery man shifted his feet. "Is it all right if I finish delivering the pizza now?"

I froze. "Delivering the pizza?"

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He nodded. "To apartment 469. It's down the corridor, then to the right, and at the end of the hall. Regular customers."

I felt distinctly empty. "Just one moment, my good man. Are you telling me that your miserable meat-ridden pizza was not intended for this apartment?"

"No. Like I said, I come out of the elevator when this man comes rushing out of here and leaves the door open. So naturally I can't help seeing the body and at a time like that you don't think about completing your delivery." He regarded the cardboard box skeptically. "On the other hand, it's probably cold now and they won't accept it. I mean, what can you do with a cold pizza?"

I very nearly told him.

Instead, Ralph and I took him to headquarters where we had him go through our mug books until he identified one Arnold McNab—a man with bushy hair, a large nose, and a shoe-brush mustache. We immediately sent out flyers.

McNab, an often caught burglar, was once again apprehended three days later when an alert pawnbroker phoned the police as McNab attempted to pawn Miss Baumgartner's jewelry.

Faced with the possession of the jewels and the identification by the pizza delivery man, McNab elected to confess.

He claimed self-defense, stating that she had attacked him with the laundry detergent bottle, which, under the stress of the moment, he had mistaken for a green club.

Ralph and I booked him and then signed out for the day.

"Ralph," I said, "it has suddenly come upon me that I have been intensely parochial. Why did I limit my search for John Smith to the Milwaukee metropolitan area? After all, he appeared only on weekends and therefore could easily have commuted from Madison, Kenosha, or even Sheboygan."

"Henry," Ralph said, "it doesn't matter who or where he is. John Smith had nothing to do with the murder. Put it out of your mind."

His eyes seemed perfectly innocent. "Henry, let me treat you to a pizza."

I turned that down. But we did go to a bar where I had two stiff sherrys and tried to forget.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

**ERNEST SAVAGE**

*When did it begin? When they were married twenty-odd years ago, or when they got divorced seven years later? Or further back still? Or the night she returned and asked Milo for a whopping sum of money? But once it started, whenever, the course of events became inexorable . . .*

# COMPANION PLANTING

***by ERNEST SAVAGE***

Milo Anders didn't like his name, even though other people seemed to. Harriet Gregory, for instance, said he was the only Milo she'd ever heard of and at least the name had distinction. And he had a nice profile, too, she used to add, tracing it with a finger; and if only he had a bit more hair, he'd be a handsome man. Still—Milo; yet she liked the name. She even liked him, she'd go on, grinning.

But that was then—many summers ago, as Milo counted time, summer being the growing season, and the growing season being Milo's principle concern; from that day on, it seemed.

Milo was into the Bio-Dynamic French Intensive Method of gardening which, if you did it right, as he'd often cautioned, would produce huge quantities of whatever you planted. Potatoes the size of squash, for example. But a potato that size would last Milo a month—an anomaly. One of the many in his life.

Milo Anders also didn't like his house. It was too big, for one thing, too old, too much in need of repairs, and the mortgage he'd had to put on it to afford the cost of divorcing Gretchen (another name for you!) all those long years ago was still eating him up. But it had a nice big back yard, and privacy—well, sort of—privacy,

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minus two, so to speak. Or plus two, depending on your point of view.

When did it start? Milo frequently asked himself that question and came up with a hopeless skein of answers. Was it when he married Gretchen twenty-odd years ago, or when he divorced her seven years later? Or was it when *his* father married *his* mother? Or when the first Milo Anders married Penelope Perkins shortly after the *Mayflower* landed? Or when the first one-celled amoeba became a two-celled amoeba, he would muse sometimes, his mind gone fey with strain and worry.

Or—he would think on a more pragmatic level—the night he and Harriet had *four* drinks after a Friday night Garden Club meeting, and he'd found Gretchen sitting on his front doorstep at midnight when he got home? Well, if it didn't actually start then, he would add to his sad thoughts, it certainly got more complicated, became what it was today. Well, not quite that, either—not by a long shot.

He had seen her in the swing of his headlights as he turned into his drive that night, but he was not sure it was she until he'd parked the car in the garage and she came walking up the drive toward him. "Milo, darling!" she said from ten feet away. "How good to see you!" The same gravelly boozer's voice as always, with the same old whine threading through it, like chalk on a blackboard.

Milo shuddered in the cool night air and could think of no amenity in response, his natural courtesy of manner gone dead at the sight of her. He said, "What do you want?" As if he didn't know.

"Darling! Is that any way to greet your wife?" She moved a pace nearer.

"Ex—" His throat was closing fast. "Ex—ex—*ex*-wife."

"Such a grump, such a dear, dear grump."

"You'll get your money on the first of the month," he said throatily. "As always." A dozen times before in the many years they'd been divorced she'd come the 90 miles from Claxton, where she lived, to Capitol City, where he lived, and pleaded for an advance on her alimony. Today was the 27th of the month; before it had usually been around the 20th, or even earlier. Once on the 12th, he remembered.

"Dear darling Milo, no, no, no, it's not that," she said, moving yet another pace nearer, "it's—well, it *is* that, I suppose, but for the last time, darling, the very *last* time."

Milo had regained partial control and moved away from her toward his back yard. "Oh, I'm sure," he said sardonically.

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"I want five thousand," she said. "Five thousand."

"What, what? Five—! What?" He wheeled and stumbled into his garden area, the figure whistling through his mind like hurricane Freda, or George, or Harry. He thought he would faint, drown, evaporate.

She followed closely, touched his bowing back. "Five thousand, darling," she said. "Only five thousand. I'm leaving the country—it will be the last time. No more alimony. I'll sign off—or whatever you do. Think of it, Milo, no more alimony—ever!"

He could think of nothing; his mind had ceased to function. He was bent, frozen in the middle of his yard. But then slowly his mind began to work again. He had $300 in the bank—the roof needed repairs, the furnace needed fixing, a still cold wet spring ahead—and only a measly $300. She drinks, she drinks it all up, no decent man would touch her with a cattle prod, no new husband ever—a hope long gone—no end to it. Five—what? Five *thousand!* He turned and under the light of the stars the look on his face made her back away a step.

"One last big drunk, is that it?" he growled thickly. "But no, you'd be back again—and again."

"Last time, Milo, I swear."

"Always the last time—never the last time." In his hands he felt the polished hickory handle of a shovel; stuck there in the ground awaiting further work. He felt his fingers tighten around it like a bat, his shoulders straighten, his muscles tense, the shovel raised and moving, the smooth swivel of his hips, a big round white slow ball heading for the plate, the bat arcing around to meet it, a swing for the fence, the clean sharp contact—smack! A homer! The crowd's roar, the crowd's dwindling roar, the dying winds of Freda, George, Harry, the silence of the night.

She didn't even shudder.

Milo slept until noon Saturday. He wakened on the couch in the living room. His shoes were clotted with dirt, lumps of it scattered on the faded velour of the couch pillows. Never in his life had he slept on the couch.

He knew at once what had happened and was full of alarm—and questions. How had she gotten here? Had somebody brought her, as twice, three times before somebody had, a splotch-veined lout waiting in a broken-down car while she chivvied, cajoled, nagged him into writing a check?

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But he'd seen no one else here last night, she'd been alone.

He got up and stumbled to the front door, opened it on the cracked concrete stoop where luckily her purse still lay, now in a bright patch of sun. He snatched it up, slammed the door shut, and leaned against it, breathless. Inside the purse was a return-trip bus ticket to Claxton, but how had she gotten from the bus station to here? A taxi? Some dutiful cabbie writing down Milo's address in those records they never throw away? Or had she walked? In her wallet he found $1.82, which meant what? Nothing. She'd been broke.

He was sweating now, and it was very clear in his mind, the whole thing, the shovel magically in his hands, the marvelous home run he'd belted out, the long hard gardener's chore of planting her in one of his Bio-Dynamic French Intensive Method vegetable beds. And then—? Groping into the house and flopping on the first soft spot he came to. But who knew she was here, whom had she told she was coming—and what was this about leaving the country? For where? With whom? He sweated.

Milo Anders worked for the State Highway Department and had for many years. His chores were varied, but required that he travel the state one week out of the month and check on this and that and the other thing. Many times in the course of his rounds he'd stopped in Claxton and spied on his ex-wife; followed her around like a gumshoe, searching for a speck of hope that she might be elevating some new boy friend into the status of husband, but that hope had long since died.

Nor had she ever lifted a hand in work all these years. She lived off what he sent her—one staggering half of his pay, with regular cost of living increases as agreed to by his numskull lawyer—and what she could cadge from beguiled bar-mates or friendly tavern-keeps. A subsidized drunk. But who among her bibulous friends had promoted a jaunt out of the country? Who knew she'd come to his house? Did anyone? Or had she come simply to test his will again—that shaky thing?

Milo went out to his back yard and studied the mound of mulchy earth that was his ex-wife's last—possibly her first—resting place. It looked orderly and neat, no different from the seven other beds he'd prepared for his spring planting. In the middle of the night, lit only by the stars, he'd done a good job. But the very thought of the thing—the awful, awful thing—tired him again and he went in and took a shower . . .

He was making himself a sandwich when they came—three car-

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loads of them, twelve people all told, the Garden Club entire, now jabbering away outside his kitchen window as he stared through its cracked pane in disbelief, in horror that he'd just plain forgotten they were coming over at one sharp for a lesson in the Bio-Dynamic French technique of bed preparation. Harriet, Bill, Charley, Muriel, Helen, all of them out there in the obligatory jeans and blue work shirts and fat expectant smiles on their faces.

Milo went into shock—there was still garden soil all over the couch in the living room, and what the hell had he done with Gretchen's purse? But he came out of it quickly enough to wire a smile on his face and step out through his kitchen door before one of them, like Harriet, could step in through it.

The Bio-Dynamic system requires that you remove one full foot of top-soil from your bed-to-be, set it aside, and then thoroughly loosen one full foot of the subsoil exposed in the resultant hole. It is tedious work and must be done carefully, and in preparing for this Saturday-afternoon demonstration Milo had partially laid open, as an example, the five- by ten-foot bed that had become Gretchen's grave. And now, as he stared at it white-faced, the fixed grin around his mouth a sickly thing, it looked exactly like what it was, a grave, the loosened soil, heavily composted, rising above the natural grade of the yard by six inches or so. In the preceding several years he'd prepared a total of eight such five-by-ten beds and his yard—to his murder-freshened eye—looked exactly like a small cemetery for extraordinarily tall people.

But he was aware that it would appear so only to him and he fought hard with subtle biological commands to get blood back in his cheeks. It didn't work.

"Methinks," Harriet said, "our host and preceptor is a trifle hung over." It was understood that he and Harriet were "a thing" and she now placed a solicitous hand on his clammy cheek, commenting on his unusual intake of booze last night. Harriet was a third- or fourth- or possibly even a fifth-assistant librarian at the Elm Street branch downtown, and was tolerated at the fringes of several social groups. She was a member of the Garden Club, but kept only a leggy geranium on the kitchen window sill of her tiny third-floor furnished walkup. She was a member of the local theater group, but had never taken a role—had never been asked to.

Twenty-odd years ago, when she and Gretchen and Milo had been within a class of each other at high school, she had been in the quiet, heatless competition for his gelid heart that Gretchen had won. But

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since the divorce she had hovered near him, as though awaiting an opening, a breech in the wall of his indifference. She would join him after meetings of one kind or another for a drink or two, would occasionally invite herself over to his decaying kitchen to cook him a meal, the soft steady buzz of her conversation sprinkled with such locutions as "methinks," and such words as "preceptor." She annoyed most people—Milo among them—but not to the point of rejection.

So the "thing" they were considered to be was never so much voiced as assumed without comment. The idea of the coupling had never crossed Milo's mind, but was coveted like a hope chest in hers; and she—although she'd never said so—awaited Gretchen's re-marriage and the end of the alimony payments as much as he. She would then make her move, she'd decided, and if she couldn't breech the wall of his indifference, she'd scale it.

"Poor baby," she said, patting his cheek again, "unbuilt for the high life."

Milo plowed past her, took up his shovel, and rammed it into the bed across a five-foot path from Gretchen's grave. "Sorry," he muttered, "had one ready—forgot." He began to turn the rich fluffy earth, his mouth making undirected sounds—"loose, keep it loose, hair-roots need space—deep, can't be too deep—compost, save everything except meat, save leaves, kitchen scraps, coffee grounds—recycle everything." This last phrase tangled the tongue in his mouth and he reared up straight, drenched in sweat. *Gretchen was being recycled not eight feet from where he stood.*

"Milo," Helen Jensen said, "you look positively ill. Perhaps we shouldn't—"

And behind her, holding something aloft, Harriet Gregory said, "Well, looky here, wouldya all! A veritable treasure, I do declare." Between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand was an earring, a small teardrop pearl in a gold clasp, and Charley Welch said, "Well now, if the French Dimebiotic Retentive method produces jewels this early in the season, I'm all for it! What about that, Milo?"

"Don't know—never saw—"

"Milo!" Helen Jensen said as he sagged against his shovel. "Folks, listen," she had turned, "we must leave. Milo is obviously not well. I insist!" She began then to mother the group back to the cars, all except Harriet, who had these implicit special rights. Harriet stopped in front of Milo, who was issuing orders to himself to straighten up and fly right.

"What is this?" she said. "Whose is it?"

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"Don't know—never saw. You can keep it."

"Yes," she said. "Methinks I will."

Milo sent his alimony check to Gretchen's Claxton address as usual, mailed it on Sunday night. Nothing had happened; no one had come or called since the Garden Club had left and he was beginning to relax a little. Saturday afternoon he cut up her handbag and its contents into tiny pieces, wrapped them in a plastic bag, which he put in a brown paper sack and then in the garbage, to be collected early Monday morning.

Sunday he planted five rows of peas in Gretchen's grave and five rows of beets in the grave—or rather, he corrected himself hurriedly, in the bed opposite hers. All through the next week he'd plant stuff in the other six beds, even though it was still early for anything but peas, carrots, and beets.

He'd decided to live his life as though nothing untoward had happened—a Hobson's choice; and on Monday, after waiting until the garbage was picked up, he went to work as usual.

The following Monday he was scheduled to make his monthly tour of the state and he drove directly to Claxton, not sure what he'd do when he got there, and when he did, doing nothing other than park down the street from her roominghouse and stare at it, the early fears alive again.

Who knew? Whom had she told she was going to see him? Had she taken a cab from the station? Then at noon, he got on with his business, the state car he was allowed to drive warm with the heat of his worries.

On the 20th of the month he got his bank statement and Gretchen's check was not among the several others. If it had been, he would have died on the spot; but neither had the envelope with the check in it been returned, and its absence deviled him terribly.

On the 29th of the month he sent off another alimony check, his signature on the bottom line so shaky that he had to rewrite the whole thing twice. On the 9th of the following month that check was returned, the notice *No longer here* scrawled across the face of the envelope.

And outside on Gretchen's grave the peas were a foot and a half high, an unheard of growth in such a short time; and which, in conjunction with the returned check—a kind of official notice of something—brought a high sweat to his brow.

He decided to call his lawyer, Nofziger, and after he explained

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about the two uncashed alimony checks, Nofziger said, "So what do you want me to do about it?"

"I don't know," Milo answered nervously. "Should I call the police?"

"What for? Maybe she ran off with someone. Count your blessings."

"Yes, but isn't there something—isn't there somebody I should—?"

"What for? It's a sleeping dog. Let it lay—or lie, as the case may be."

Nofziger, as usual, hadn't helped, and on the 29th of that month he sent another check, which was returned a week later with the notice *No longer here!* slashed almost savagely across the envelope. And a few days after that Milo was picking giant peas from Gretchen's grave, six weeks earlier than ever before. It shook him badly. The beets were just working up their leaves and some of the other stuff hadn't even broken ground. It awed him as well, and he thought obliquely, wildly: Companion Planting—they like her!

Milo didn't really enjoy gardening. He'd taken it up three or four years ago because he had the space and because it was the cheapest form of recreation he could find. And then he'd heard about the Bio-Dynamic French Intensive Method of gardening, sent for the still-limited literature on the subject, and studied it with care. It offered such new ideas (to him) as "companion planting," in which certain vegetables planted side by side—such as potatoes and beans, for instance—exercise a symbiotic thrust on each other and produce even more bounteous crops than other regimens do.

And now he thought, more calmly—a measure of his growing detachment from the felony in his past—I should have put her in with the asparagus, the vegetable he loved best of all and couldn't get enough of.

On the weekend of July 4th, with its extra day of leisure, Harriet Gregory arrived at Milo's house by cab with two bulging suitcases in her hands. She paid off the cab driver, put the bags down in front of Milo's garage, and without a word went into his workshop. She emerged in a few moments with two redwood sticks that Milo used to prop up plants, tied them together in the form of a cross with a piece of string she'd brought along, planted the cross at the head of Gretchen's grave, and stood there smiling at him sweetly. He'd given up the Garden Club—everything, in fact, but his job—and he hadn't seen her in weeks.

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"What's that for?" he said thickly, his heart thumping in his chest.

"For her," Harriet said. "In memoriam. Did you say a word or two for her soul, Milo?" Her smile grew arch. "Probably not. But one should, *n'est-ce pas?* Well, tomorrow perhaps, on the Fourth itself. We'll put a flag at the other end and do it up properly, gather a seemly group of mourners, maybe even a cop or two."

"Take that thing out of there!" Milo rasped. He took one lurching step toward her, but she held up a cautioning hand and he stopped.

"No, no," she said. "None of that. They know I'm here."

"Who does?"

"My colleagues at the library. I told them—well, I *implied* that we were to be married. I resigned. I'm to live here, Milo darling, forever."

"No!"

"Yes—in comfort and security."

"The earring," Milo gurgled.

"The earring," she echoed. "That and other things. Men have no memory for such minutiae, but you gave her those earrings many years ago—before you were wed."

"What other things?"

"Your distress last spring the day the Garden Club arrived *en masse*. That was the day after the deed, wasn't it? And your new car."

"My new car?" He had indeed bought a new car, the first in twelve years.

"Yes, your new car—the cherry on the sundae of my life, if you'll forgive a clumsy metaphor. I saw you in it last week downtown—the confirming detail. You had money now, I thought; and of course I knew why."

She stepped up to him and touched his cheek in a gesture of intimacy that repelled him as it never had before. "I will have," she said, "the entire second floor. I will want the front bedroom for my own and the back bedroom for my sitting room and library. I'm a great reader, Milo, and I will want many books. I intend to read for the rest of my life. I intend never to lift another finger in work."

"How will you eat? Who will cook?" he said feebly.

"*You* will cook, dear lad. You're so much better at it than I. Particularly with vegetables—which I've grown to love. Peas, for instance—oh, how I do love fresh garden peas."

Milo made a choking sound and Harriet backed off a step, coyly. "Sex—? What a rogue you are. But of course, old sock, there'll be

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none of that, none whatsoever. It is much too late for that sort of thing, old brick. Twenty-odd years ago—perhaps; but then you chose another."

She moved daintily around him toward the back door. "Oh," she said, turning, "after you've removed the cross from Gretchen's grave, you will bring the bags up to my room, there's a dear boy."

The years came and went. In the first year Milo redecorated the entire second floor, after first having repaired the roof and modernized the bathroom. Thick carpeting was laid from wall to wall, its expensive champagne hue complementing the subtle Empire blues of the wallpaper she'd selected, Milo lugging home the sample book from the most elegant store in town. New furniture and drapes, a huge remote-controlled TV, original oil paintings for the walls—whatever her repressed little heart desired kept Milo as fiscally strapped as he had ever been; more so, even, because the alimony was at least reasonably predictable, but her needs seemed ever to rise. At her insistence he got a job reassignment that ended his week out of town—his sabbatical week, as he came to think of it when it was gone. She needed him at home, to cook and clean, to fetch and tote.

And books, books, books! Every day's mail, it seemed, brought new books, and they began to stack up unopened in the corners of her "library." But she got nothing else in the mail—ever.

The first year she went downtown twice, once each for the spring and fall sales to renew her wardrobe, buying nothing but housecoats, pajamas, slippers, and the like. And on these occasions she had her hair cut and set. But the second and third and fourth years she sent Milo on her shopping errands and had opted to let her hair grow. Her crowning glory, she came to call it, and each night she had Milo, when he came up to get her empty supper tray, brush it out a hundred times on each side while she sat in front of her vanity mirror staring at his reflection and counting silently, her lips forming the numbers.

They had no visitors and Milo went nowhere, save to work and twice a week to shop; and once each year in June to enter his peas in a spring vegetable contest at one of the local nurseries, first prize being a $50 credit voucher which he always sorely needed, and which in the second through the seventh years, he won.

His garden remained his only recreation, and a substantial source of income, considering that a penny saved is a penny earned, and

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he worked at it almost all year round, putting in late crops as well as early, broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage in the fall.

Harriet hadn't come downstairs since the fourth year and had begun turning night into day, reading or watching TV until dawn and making Milo modify his overwrought schedule to accommodate hers, demanding a substantial meal at two A.M. along with all the others. And she grew fat as the years passed, needing his help sometimes to rise from a chair. This worried him and he tried to put her on a diet, but she refused, her life being as complete as it was . . .

In June of the eighth year Milo won *two* first prizes for his entries in the annual vegetable contest, and, following the little presentation ceremony, a stranger approached him and said, "Pardon me, sir, but I have noticed over the past several years your extraordinary peas and I'm wondering if you'd reveal the secret of your success?"

Milo, who'd retired from his job with the Highway Department earlier that spring, and had grown increasingly taciturn and reclusive, had to clear his throat twice before muttering a reply.

"Companion planting," he said.

"And that incredible asparagus, sir?"

"The same," Milo said. "Companion planting."

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*From the author's accompanying letter: "The other night, with great satisfaction, I announced to my dinner companion that I had come up with an utterly new and entertaining way to kill someone." Which in due course Mr. Adams did—kill someone. No, no, not his dinner companion—someone in a story . . .*

# FEEDBACK

## by T. M. ADAMS

"What's that?" Quell asked incuriously.

"Feedback? Well, basically it's a type of output that has a modifying effect on the device that produces it," Ohr said carefully. He leaned back in his free-form chair and pursed his lips thoughtfully, glancing around, as if for inspiration, at the chic labor-saving devices that decorated his office. "Give you the simplest example," he said finally. "A microphone is attached to an amplifying speaker. You let the mike get too close to the speaker, and what do you hear?"

"That loud sort of squealing noise, you mean?" Quell said. He was mopping his forehead and hoping to end the interview quickly. A monstrously fat, unhealthy-looking man, Quell often felt too warm.

"Correct," Ohr said. "That squealing noise is feedback. What happens is that the microphone picks up a very faint hum from the speaker; this goes through the wire and comes out of the speaker amplified. The mike then picks up the *amplified* noise, which goes through the wire again and comes out the speaker *re-amplified*—to be picked up by the microphone *again*—"

"You mean it just keeps going round and round," Quell said.

"Getting louder and louder each time," Ohr said, nodding, "so fast that within a second or two you get a squealing noise loud enough to overload your speaker. Well, that's what we call a 'feedback loop.' And feedback is only one problem in electronic surveillance."

"Bugging, you mean," Quell said dully. Although he had represented himself as a potential major customer for the Ohr Electro-Security Corporation when he'd made the appointment for this meeting, Quell barely bothered to act the part. Actually, he was an

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independent contractor, hired on a special one-shot basis by Ohr's bitterest competitor.

"Okay, call it bugging," Ohr said, with a shrug. "Well, feedback, electronic interference, acoustical dead spots, and just plain noise—these are the problems you face. Suppose you want to monitor—okay, bug—someone who is talking to a second party on a busy sidewalk. No matter what type of microphone you use, whether you conceal a transmitter on the target's person or aim a parabolic job from across the street, you're still going to pick up all sorts of confusing noise that may drown out the words you want to hear."

"That's why they need your filter, hunh?" Quell said.

Ohr grimaced. "Not just a filter," he said. "It's a micro-computer module. Once you've cued it to the characteristic range of frequencies for the particular type of sound you're interested in—that is, once you've given it a sonic 'fingerprint,' like an oscilloscope pattern for a human voice, for example—then my device will analyze everything your microphone picks up, passing through only the one sound you want to hear.

"Nothing new about the basic idea, but my invention is infinitely more sophisticated than anything that's been done in this line before. Let me give you a live demonstration."

"Sure," Quell said. This sounded like what he'd been waiting for.

Ohr pulled a palm-sized remote-control console from his pocket, and holding it close to his chest, pushed a few buttons. From hidden speakers in the walls came a peculiar syncopated sound, like two boys dribbling basketballs on a linoleum floor. "What you're listening to—live—are sounds that are present right now in this room, enormously magnified," Ohr said. "Notice that although I'm talking, you can't hear my voice coming from the speakers at all. Only one particular type of sound is being passed on by my module. Can you tell what it is?"

"Could you turn it up?" Quell asked.

"Certainly," Ohr said, apparently glad to have caught Quell's interest at last. He thumbed a dial and the basketball noises became as loud as bass drums beating.

"How's that?" he asked loudly.

"Perfect!" Quell said—sincerely; he hated silencers—and pulled out a small-caliber revolver. He fired twice at point-blank range, both times on the beat. Ohr slumped in his free-form chair.

As usual, in Quell's experience, the atmosphere of the room changed entirely. Even the pounding sounds from the speakers were

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different, half as frequent and more regular—like one basketball instead of two.

Quell heaved his bulk erect, puffing a little, and went around the desk to make sure he'd done a clean job. Now all he had to do was distract Ohr's secretary on the way out—ask her to put through a call to Quell's answering service (a confederate in a phone booth)—in order to keep her from looking in on her boss for the two minutes it would take Quell to get past the building's security guards to his car. But first Quell had to turn off Ohr's noisy device; he could hardly pretend to be leaving in the middle of a demonstration.

His first bullet had passed through the remote control, destroying it. Quell grunted with annoyance and flicked perspiration out of his eyes. He'd have to turn off the device at the source, wherever that was. He pushed Ohr's body aside and opened up the cabinet-like desk, to reveal a panel of switches and dials, none of them labeled.

Quell turned several dials at random. A few seemed to have no effect; one or two ignited spotlighting in different parts of the room; another caused a movie screen to crawl down the far wall. Increasingly nervous, Quell decided to leave the switches alone before he accidentally tripped a fire alarm or security alert.

Instead, he tried to locate the speakers, but even this proved impossible; the rough fabric wall-covering was especially designed to conceal them. He bent over to look for wires running along the baseboards, and a tide of dizziness swept through him (the sort of thing that had sent him to the doctor the week before: "I don't know what business you're in, Mr. Quell, but it seems to subject you to dangerous levels of stress.") He leaned against one of Ohr's bookcases, breathing heavily. The amplified basketball sound had abruptly become louder and faster, and now Quell recognized it.

It was the beating of his heart.

Quell checked his pulse to make sure; yes, it was throbbing in time with the noise. Well, it figured: there had been two basketballs, and now there was one. "Spooky," Quell commented, irritated to see by his watch that his pulse was hammering along at 90-odd beats a minute. But he realized his problem was solved. As soon as he left the room and its hidden microphones, the noise would stop, just as though a still-living Ohr were ending the demonstration. Chuckling wheezily, Quell propped up the dead body and made for the door.

He stopped there, dumfounded. (The pounding noise from the walls increased its pace.) The door had no knob, no handle of any kind. It hadn't struck him as important at the time, but the door

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had been opened and shut electronically—another gimmick. He waved his arms in front of the portal—no electric eye, apparently. Maybe the switch was on the wall, genteelly camouflaged by an interior decorator—but Quell couldn't find it. He tried to remember; the secretary had opened the door from her desk, and he thought perhaps Ohr had closed it from his. Back to the desk, then, to take his chances with those switches.

He couldn't open the door and, as before, he couldn't turn off the noise; he couldn't produce any effect except to start an electric pencil sharpener snarling—he was ashamed to hear his super-echoed heartbeat jump a notch in alarm at the unexpected sound.

He opened the other side of Ohr's desk and swore, seeing another control panel there. He attacked it and almost immediately heard the voice of Ohr's secretary come from another hidden speaker, half drowned in heartbeat noises: "Yes, Mr. Ohr?"

"Oops, forget it," Quell said, in a desperate imitation of Ohr's higher voice. He turned that (intercom?) switch back off, and stood listening to the room echo his panic. *POUND POUND POUND POUND* Even if he found the switch, he'd be at the desk as the door opened—when he'd want to be on the threshold, blocking any view of Ohr's body.

He was trapped. And how could he think his way out with these walls booming down at him?

"Mr. Ohr? Mr. Ohr?" The secretary's voice had come again, unbidden. "I hate to interrupt you, Mr. Ohr, but the people next door are complaining about the noise."

*POUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUND*

"Mr. Ohr? . . . Mr. Ohr, can you hear me?"

*POUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUND* ka*POUND*

What was that? His heart had missed a beat; as he listened, it happened again. Moving toward the door, Quell tried to remember the terms the doctor had used in his warning: "Fibrillations—tachycardia." But first things first: If the woman outside would just come in, Quell thought, he could wave his gun and force her into a closet.

*POUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUND* ka*POUND*

Faint, he found himself leaning against the door; he could barely hear Ohr's secretary as she shouted on the other side, so great was the noise around him: "Mr. Ohr? . . . answering the intercom . . . very loud . . . know you've got the door control on Override?" *She can't get in,* Quell realized dully, massaging his right arm, which had suddenly and unaccountably begun to hurt. The noise—

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It all came down to the noise. If it weren't for the noise the secretary wouldn't be alarmed and Quell wouldn't be frightened. If it weren't for the noise he'd be able to think. The noise wasn't like just hearing his pulse—it was like hearing himself pulled apart. Somehow he had to make a mental effort to control it, to bring the speed and volume down. He held his breath; he gritted his teeth—

"Mr. Ohr? Mr. Ohr?"

*POUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUNDPOUND*

Worse! Somehow he was making it worse all the time, as though the more desperate he felt the faster it went, and the faster it went the more desperate he felt, and the more desperate he felt

Ohr's secretary was terrified. The continuous racket in the next room had risen to the level of machine-gun fire; the pictures on her side of the wall were jiggling wildly. She pressed her ear to the door and thought that above the din she also heard a human cry—a sort of loud squealing noise—and the crash of something heavy falling over. She immediately went to her phone and began dialing Security. As she did so, the sound next door became violently irregular.

Then there was silence—total silence.

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a *NEW* Uncle Abner story by

**JOHN F. SUTER**

*There is only one detective who can be called the man of the Bible and the voice of the Lord—Uncle Abner who Squire Randolph says "is as honest a man as walks the earth." In this new story Uncle Abner encounters a series of obscurities. He speaks in riddles, but step by step he reasons his way to the one truth.*

*"It could be God or devil, then," said Abner. "Let us hope that it is God. The Devil is already at work here" . . .*

# THE AXE OF ELISHA

## *by JOHN F. SUTER*

It was a desecration of a cemetery which took Uncle Abner and Squire Randolph up on Baird's Ridge that day.

The cemetery was a small one, on a gentle knoll no higher than fifty feet. At the time this happened, there were only twenty-seven graves, many of them dug by Saul Duncan. The knoll was a peaceful spot, sunny and cooled by light breezes. Violets were plentiful among the pines which fringed it. The twenty-seven dead could have come to no more peaceful long home.

Now the quiet had been shattered. One of the graves had been opened the night before.

The grave was that of Miriam Duncan, Saul's wife, dead for fourteen months. Not only had her grave been opened, but the lid of her coffin had been removed.

Worse, Saul did not know it, and he might never know it. His own life hung in the balance at this time.

Abner and Randolph stood with Leah Baird before Samuel Baird's farmhouse. They had visited the cemetery earlier. Now they had crossed the ravine which separated it from the next hill and were

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looking down from a spot another two hundred feet above.

"I'm sorry Sam isn't here," Leah Baird said. "You know how he is. He tries, without stopping, to better our lot. He took his axe and a rope and went down to the grove of elms along the creek to cut a tree. How is it that you missed him?"

"We came by the back way," replied Randolph. He motioned toward the side of the house where their horses grazed quietly.

Leah Baird looked again at the cemetery and sighed. "A terrible thing. What does Saul have to say?"

Abner glanced at Randolph. "Saul has not yet been told. He was walking yesterday among the rocks near where Johnson has flax planted, and a rattlesnake bit his ankle. He went to Dr. Storm for treatment at once, but the poison was deep in him. He is very sick. He might not live."

"He is not even at his house," Randolph added. "Storm has him in the extra room at his own house. The housekeeper is helping to care for him."

Leah Baird hugged herself tightly. She was a tall woman, still handsome in a dark way. She stared down at the desecrated grave.

"It would not be seen easily from the road," she said. "Miriam was buried at the back of the graveyard, behind the curve of the ground. Whoever did it was almost completely safe, with the darkness also on his side.

"He might still be seen," Abner said. "There is a clear view from here, and he had to have a light."

"I saw and heard nothing," Leah remarked.

"Did Sam?" Randolph asked.

"I doubt that he did," she replied. "He went down early to Spring's Tavern, and it was past eleven when he returned. He mentioned nothing unusual, except that his horse slipped and spilled him. I don't believe that either of us awoke in the night."

It was clear that nothing more would be gained by staying. Randolph and Abner thanked her and took their leave.

As Randolph and Abner rode slowly down the hill, Randolph shook his head.

"Abner," he said, "do you think we can discover who did this thing? And why?"

"I believe I know why it was done," Abner replied. "It lies in something Saul Duncan told Adam Bird just before Adam baptized him years ago. I happened to be present. As to who—"

He held up his hand.

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"There is someone in the elm grove."

A small run flowed past Baird's house on the downhill side, winding through brush and saplings until it joined another run about eighty feet lower down. Beyond this point it was a small creek flowing swift and shallow, until it plunged over a ledge some seventy feet high. Below this fall, it ran in deeper pools.

It was near this creek where Abner and Randolph expected to find Baird. However, if he had been felling timber, he must be resting, for there was no sound of his axe.

The elm grove was on a level bench of the hillside, where the shade of the large trees permitted less brush to grow. The creek ran along the outside, to the left as one came downhill on the path from Baird's house.

Here, just inside the grove, a man sat on a large, wind-splintered limb. He appeared to be studying a small-size elm which showed the marks of an axe.

He was a man with little extra flesh on his bones, but what there was did not lack muscle. He was plainly dressed in drab black, even to a broad-brimmed, flat-crowned hat. Of average height, he might have escaped anyone's attention if it were not for two things: his pallor, which was evident even in the hair showing beneath his hat, and the striking length of his hands and feet.

The man looked up as the two riders approached.

"An impatient man has been at work here," he said.

"Why do you say that?" asked Randolph.

"He could not wait to finish cutting the tree," the stranger replied. "He had to go do something else—something less difficult, perhaps."

Abner examined the tree. The felling cuts had been completed almost halfway. The directional notch at the back of the tree had also been made. The final strokes had not been made; the tree still stood.

"It is a danger," the man remarked. "He should not have left it."

"It is not safe," Abner agreed. "However, this is elm wood, and its cutting is hard to predict. Splitting it is even worse. Baird is a carpenter and knows this. More, he is not impatient. Something happened before he finished."

He dismounted from his great chestnut horse and handed the reins to Randolph. He bent to examine the tree more closely.

"Abner," said Randolph, "surely this is of no importance."

"If anyone behaves in a way that is unlike him, it could be important," said Abner. "However, I think that the answer is simple.

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While he worked with this stubborn wood, I think Baird's axehead came loose and flew off. There is a peculiar skidding mark here. He probably lost the iron in the stream and went to get another."

"He was not at home," said Randolph.

"No," said Abner. "Then he had no spare axe at his house. He must have gone to buy one."

He turned to the stranger. "You came this way. Did you meet a man on the path?"

The pale man shook his head. "I passed no one."

Abner exchanged glances with Randolph. "Which direction did he go?" Randolph asked.

Abner was studying the stranger. "Have you been here long?"

"Only long enough to investigate that tree and sit down to rest."

There were smudges of dirt on the stranger's knees. The one on the right knee was brownish and sandy. The one on the left knee was smeary and gray against the black cloth. Abner glanced at them. "You drank water from the stream before you sat down?"

The stranger nodded. "I was thirsty from climbing the path."

"You drank in the manner of Gideon's three hundred?"

The pale man's faint eyebrows rose. "I did. I went down on one knee and lapped water from my hand. As you say, like one of Gideon's men."

"They were wary men," said Abner.

The stranger seemed amused. "We seem to share certain traits, sir."

"And what would they be?"

"First of all, I am Alan McDowell, from Norfolk. I am a visionary."

Abner said slowly, "A visionary. You see things, then? You assume that I have power, too?"

"It would seem so," McDowell answered. "You divined how I drank."

"That is nothing," said Abner. "The sandy smudge on your right knee came from the edge of the water over there, and it is only on one knee. What brings you here from Norfolk?"

"A vision. In a dream, I saw a man and a woman and a house on a hillside. The hillside was like this one. The man and his wife were in great danger. Somehow I knew their names and where they lived. Somehow I knew that the danger could be averted if I came here. I came."

"That is a selfless act," said Abner. "What are the names of those in your dream?"

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"Baird. Samuel and Leah Baird."

"And the danger?"

McDowell shook his head. "That I must not tell you. It may be that you two are part of it."

"Nonsense!" snorted Randolph. "I am Squire Randolph, Justice of the Peace, and Abner, here, is as honest a man as walks the earth!"

The pale man smiled and remained unmoved. "Sir, I do not doubt you. Still, I must refuse."

He glanced down. "My staff, it's getting dirty here in the leaf mold."

He stooped and picked up a long staff, then got up and carried it to the stream, where the water was leaping and scurrying past rocks. He thrust the staff into one of the deeper, shadowy pools.

Surprise crossed his face. "The end is wedged in something." He worked the end of the wood to and fro.

Suddenly the staff seemed to move more freely. McDowell lifted it horizontally, as though something might be on the end. It broke the surface of the water.

McDowell exclaimed, and Randolph echoed him.

Impaled on the end of the staff, which was thrust through the hole where a helve would be, was the head of an axe.

"The axe of Elisha!" McDowell said, in a startled voice.

"What does he mean?" Randolph asked Abner.

"The prophet, Elisha, did something like this," Abner replied. "Some men were cutting wood to build a house by the Jordan. One lost an axehead in the stream. It was a valuable tool, and it was borrowed. The prophet, who was with them, cut a stick and thrust it into the water. The iron came to the top and was saved."

He addressed himself to McDowell. "Pass me the staff and the iron, if you would."

The other man did so. Abner looked first at the axehead, which seemed in no way unusual, except for the water and some sand and silt that were oozing away with the water. He then ran his hands along the staff, occasionally flipping away drops of water. At one point he paused and detached something from the dry part of the wood. He put it on a nearby stone and put his foot on it.

"A leech," he remarked. "You must be careful where you lay your staff, McDowell."

In the end, he pulled the axehead from the staff and returned the stick. He kept the iron.

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He looked at the thing in his hand, then raised his eyes to McDowell.

"A remarkable coincidence. The dark iron could not be seen in that pool, shadowed as it is now. You claim to be a visionary. Are you Elisha, come again?"

"If I am, it has not been revealed to me," said McDowell. "Would you call this a sign?"

"We have seen a sign," Abner answered. "We have seen more than one since we rode into this grove. The meaning is not clear."

"There is need enough for a prophet," grumbled Randolph. "A man may be dying, and his wife's grave has been desecrated. If you are even the remotest relative of Elisha, tell us who is responsible."

"I am not a man of God," McDowell said, "in spite of my powers. I am acquainted with Gideon, Samson, Elijah, and Elisha through my brother. He has been pastor of a church in Richmond for twenty years."

Abner heard this with interest. "You must be here at his suggestion."

"No," said McDowell. "No man sent me."

"It could be God or devil, then," said Abner. "Let us hope that it is God. The Devil is already at work here."

"I have seen enough of the Devil," McDowell said. "I am ready to accept help from elsewhere."

"You say you are a visionary," Randolph remarked. "How do you live? Do you locate lost things, as you just did? Do you foretell futures?"

"I get not a penny for that," said McDowell. He held up his long hands. "I have skill with these. I can fix any common thing. Many men are clumsy. I am not. I am not rich, but I am not a beggar."

"Do you own much clothing?" asked Abner.

The pale man laughed. "You see all my outer garments. I own an extra shirt or two, some extra undergarments and hose. These are in a small bag at the inn. That is all."

"Abner," said Randolph tiredly, "we should be trying to find Baird, to learn what he might know. We sound like a crowd of old wives."

"We might discover Baird without so much going to and fro," Abner said. "Perhaps McDowell will discover him for us. What did he look like in your dream?"

The pale man closed his eyes. The lashes were almost invisible.

"A man still young."

"Yes. Go on, McDowell, unless we interrupt."

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"He is a short man, methodical, but sometimes letting his temper have the upper hand. Round-faced, but not fat. Thin, fine, brown hair. He will lose it." He paused, apparently groping.

"He enjoys the tavern, sometimes too much. He is an able man who is living well enough. That is not sufficient. He has begun to clear this grove for a new pasture. He would have more cattle. Beef cattle. That is all I can see now."

"Not where he is?" asked Randolph.

"No."

"It would almost seem as though he had talked to the man," Randolph said. "Does this sound like Elisha to you, Abner?"

"No," said Abner, "but not everything that man of God did was written. At the same time, we have seen no sign of his presence except the one thing."

"It is a day of obscurities for everyone except McDowell," said Randolph.

"Not at all," said Abner. "We know that McDowell did not desecrate the grave."

"Why should he?" retorted Randolph.

"Many of those we know would say that he did because he is a stranger. He seems to have a strange gift. Who knows why such a man would open a grave and remove the lid from a coffin?"

"He had no reason," snorted Randolph.

"I believe that he did," Abner said. His manner was very sober. "As to his innocence, think, Randolph. We have talked to several persons about the ransacking of Duncan's house and the violation of the grave. No mention was made that a stranger sought to find the locations.

"Even more, the earth of the graveyard is a yellow clay, almost white. It would stain clothing badly. There are no such stains here. And he says he owns no other clothing."

McDowell broke in. "Your talk is meaningless to me. I have committed no crime here."

Abner looked at him. "I have not said so. But you have seen enough of the Devil. So you said."

McDowell set his jaw. "That I said. But that is behind me."

"Not quite," said Abner sternly. "The Devil is still here, although in a guise you might not have met."

"You would have to explain that."

Abner held up the axehead. "I hold one sign of the Devil in my hand."

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"Why," said Randolph, "a few breaths ago you were likening it to the experience of a holy man."

Abner shook his head.

"He made that assertion. He acknowledged the parallel, but I did not say I accepted it."

"What has the Devil to do with it?" demanded Randolph.

"Think about Baird," Abner urged him. "He is known as a capable man. He is a carpenter. He is careful of his tools. The axehead went into the water.

"He did not return to his house to fit a new head on the helve.

"He did not go down the path to purchase a new head. McDowell says he met no one coming down as he climbed the hill. I believe him.

"He did not do the most normal thing of all. He did not wade into the water and grope for the missing iron."

"The depth of the pool—" Randolph began.

"It is of no great depth," said Abner. "You could see that from McDowell's staff."

"What does this mean, then?"

"It means that the Devil guided McDowell's hand to strike Baird down."

"The prophets of Saul's time were no stranger than this!" exclaimed McDowell. "Why should I do such a thing? Where is your proof?"

Abner faced him with the sternness of a prosecutor. "I believe that you came up to this grove when Baird had just lost his axehead. I believe that the two of you quarreled, and you struck him down. I see no rope here, the one that Baird brought to help him bring down the tree. I believe that you trussed him with the rope and hid him, to give him time to consider telling you what you want to know."

The pale man's lips curled in scorn. "A madman! I offer others nothing but good, and you say that I do violence."

"It may be that it has been a long time since you did violence before today," Abner said.

"And today's was wasted violence, as I intend to show you. All the same, when a man has blood about him which is not his own, I wonder what he has done."

"Blood!" cried McDowell. "Show me any blood on me!"

"Not on you," Abner replied. "And since I see no cut or wound on you, it must not be yours. No, McDowell, the reason you thrust your

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staff into the stream was to wash away traces of Baird's blood!"

The man in black snatched up the staff and held it out. "Show me the blood!"

"It is not there," said Abner. "But it was there, and one of God's most unloved creatures showed it to me."

He stepped forward and pointed to the stone where he had trodden on the leech. Its flattened body still lay there.

It was surrounded by a red stain.

"That leech was on your staff," Abner said. "It took up some of the blood that was there. Baird's blood."

"It was the blood of some animal it had sucked before it crawled onto my staff," McDowell said.

"Why would it leave the animal?" Abner asked. "And how will you answer if I lead us to where you have hidden Baird? Will he speak for you or for me?"

Surprise seized McDowell. "I have no way to tell how he would speak. You must know his whereabouts better than I do."

"I intend to test that," said Abner. "But before we go, I have to say some things. Are you here because of loyalty to your brother?"

"My brother? What has he to do with this?"

"Perhaps everything. Was something valuable stolen from his church ten years ago?"

McDowell's mood changed. "There was. Do you know where it is? Tell me!"

Abner shook his head. "I only know where it is not."

Randolph could keep silent no longer. "What was stolen? Why is he here?"

"It was the silver communion service from his brother's church," replied Abner. "I heard of this from Saul Duncan, as I started to say earlier. McDowell came because he believes it is here, but he is wrong. The rest I can explain when we find Baird."

"Let him put his vision to our use, then," snorted Randolph.

"I believe that he has luck, not vision," Abner answered. "Chance brought the iron from the water, and he used it. The dream of danger is no more than a tale. He is the danger to Baird. He did not dare tell us that."

"But," said Randolph, "if the theft was ten years ago, why is he here only now?"

"Because he is more Gehazi than Elisha."

"Abner," snapped Randolph, "there are enough riddles without another."

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"Gehazi was Elisha's servant. When his master cured Naaman, captain of the host of Syria's king, of leprosy, this servant exacted payment from Naaman. When the man of God learned this, he caused Gehazi's skin to become white as snow."

Randolph stepped back in horror. "A leper?"

"No," said Abner, "a released prisoner. See how pale he is."

"Released. Yes," nodded Randolph. "That would explain it. And we must find Baird, if you are right." He turned on McDowell. "Take us to him."

McDowell shook his head. "Let him. I am convinced that he is trying to halt my search."

"Very well," said Abner. "We must leave our horses here."

When the horses were tethered, Abner addressed McDowell. "The mark of where you went is on you, McDowell. Come along."

He led the way down the path until it branched away from the stream. He then turned aside and followed the stream to the fall. Beside the fall, a steep, very faint track went down a high bank to the base of the fall.

"You are a strong man, McDowell," said Abner, "and I am sure that you went down that carrying Baird over your shoulder. But I believe you came up in haste, slipped, and fell to your left knee. See the mark in the soil—the only soil like it around here. Look at the smear it made on your left knee."

"Then Baird is—" began Randolph.

"In a hollow of the rock behind the waterfall," said Abner. With McDowell between them, Abner and Randolph descended to the bottom of the waterfall. Randolph looked at the water with distaste and stood by the edge of the pool below the fall. Abner, however, stepped inward toward the rock and went behind the curtain of water.

In a few minutes he reappeared, a length of rope coiled over his shoulder, leading a younger, shorter man, whose clothes were smeared with dried yellow mud. The back of his head was covered with dried blood.

"Baird!" Randolph exclaimed. "Abner was right."

The younger man was blinking from emerging into stronger light. Finally he saw the pale man.

"You caught him, then," he growled. "Better you have him locked up quickly, Squire."

"Perhaps not," Abner said.

McDowell looked at him in surprise.

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"Your coming this far west in Virginia was a mistake," Abner said to him. "The silver is not here, and it never was. Saul Duncan came here nine years ago, and it was no great problem for Adam Bird, one of our preachers, to convert him. I was present when Duncan asked to be baptized. He told Adam that his brother and another man had robbed a church in Richmond of its silver communion service ten years ago. The other man knew where it was kept. Almost as soon as the theft occurred, the thieves were taken, but not before Duncan's brother hid the silver. The thieves were jailed, denying their crime to the last.

"Duncan told Adam that his brother must have wanted the silver for himself, telling his partner that he had given it to Saul to hide. In the months after the theft, Duncan's house was ransacked several times, possibly by friends of the other man. Saul left Richmond and came here for safety. He never knew what happened afterward."

McDowell listened. A calm had settled on him.

"I was that other man," he said. "Duncan's brother died in prison. I never ceased to want that silver. But a year ago, my reason for wanting it changed. I determined to get it and return it to my brother."

"So you came here looking for Saul Duncan," said Abner.

"I did. And I asked only one person where to find him."

"The wrong person," said Abner. "Or under the wrong circumstances. You met him in Spring's Tavern and drank with him. You drank too much. This could have been little enough, after ten years' imprisonment. You asked about Duncan, and you told why you wanted him. You told a man who thought he needed money."

He looked first at Baird, then at Randolph. "This is the man he told, Randolph. This is the one who searched Duncan's house, opened his wife's grave, and thought to discover that a coffin was a hiding place. When McDowell heard of that, he thought Baird had found the silver. That is why he came here, struck Baird down, and put him behind the waterfall until hunger might force him to talk.

"But, Randolph, Baird is not a bad man, as we know. He is ambitious and an obvious fool, sometimes. How can he be punished?"

"His act was appalling," Randolph said slowly. "I am uncertain what the lawbooks will say."

"I am not the judge," said Abner. "If I were, I should spare his wife the knowledge. My pronouncement would be that he fix the coffin, as a carpenter, and fill in the grave again as a friend of Saul Duncan's.

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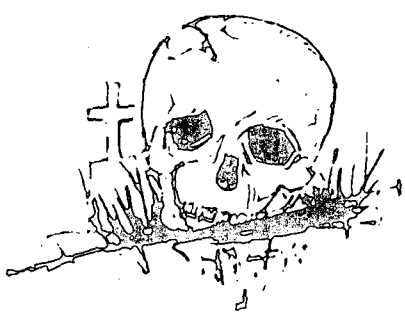
"Then," Abner said sternly, "my last requirement would be that he provide, free of charge, a coffin for everyone who needs one in his lifetime. He could agree to this punishment now."

Baird faced the three of them, his cheeks red with anger or shame. "You can't judge me like this! It's only this man's word, and he is already a convicted criminal!"

"Baird," thundered Abner, "a mark was put on this man, and it brought us to you. A mark is on you, too, which judges you. You thought to explain it to your wife by saying that your horse threw you. Look at your clothing. See the yellowish marks of the graveyard clay!"



## DETECTIVERSE

### *FINAL PAYMENT*

*by VIRGIL STRIEBY*

A semi-smart embezzler was bookkeeper Jack E. Lux.
He keyed the firm's computer to pay him a million bucks.
He fidgeted the digits, but the code was too complex.
His body was found buried in a million one-buck checks.

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*The branch manager of an American electronics firm in Athens is kidnaped by terrorists . . .*

# ASSIGNMENT: ENIGMA

## by ANTHONY CIRCUS

Charles Spacer strode quickly down the steps of Conco International's headquarters in Athens and headed for the waiting limousine. Though it was the middle of the afternoon, Sophocles Street was uncluttered. For that he was thankful. It was much too warm a day to be caught in a traffic jam.

"Charles!" a voice called out as he reached the limousine. He turned and saw that it was Rina, on her way back to the office from a late lunch.

"How are you?" he asked. He hadn't seen her in two days.

"Fine. I thought you would call last night."

"It's been a busy week."

"I've heard that before."

"Sorry. Will you be home tonight?"

"Try me and see."

He smiled and opened the car door. "I might do that."

He settled into the back seat and gave the driver the address of a warehouse across town where the company's air-freight shipments were received and stored. It was a routine matter, really—something that any one of a half-dozen subordinates could have handled—but it gave him an excuse to leave the office early. As it was he hadn't been quite early enough to avoid seeing Rina.

Rina—Katrina Collins—was the woman he occasionally saw, on those nights when he didn't feel particularly faithful to a middle-aged wife back in Oak Park, Illinois. Rina was tall and slim and dark-haired, with a trace of a smile always playing about her lips, even when she seemed angry. She was the new assistant controller, a well-paid position for a woman in her early thirties, and one that she'd got on her own before she even started seeing the Athens branch manager. He respected her, and once in a while when he

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was being sentimental he even imagined he might be in love with her. But that feeling never lasted too long because Charles Spacer was a most unsentimental person.

George, his Greek driver, half turned in the seat. "The street's blocked up ahead, Mr. Spacer."

"Go around it, can't you? Up one of those streets?"

But the limousine was not built for navigating the narrow back streets of Athens. As George attempted to maneuver the car, the front door on the driver's side was yanked rudely open. A man Spacer had never seen before touched the side of George's bald head with the barrel of a machine pistol.

"Slide over," the man ordered. "I'm driving now." George uttered a whimper of fright and obeyed.

In the same instant the doors on both sides of Spacer were pulled open and two armed men slid in, crowding him to the center of the seat. The one on his right aimed a pistol at the back of George's head, while the one on his left—an ugly black-bearded man—said, "You're being kidnaped, Mr. Spacer. Don't resist and you won't be harmed."

"I have no money," he said, keeping his voice calm.

"But your company has. Do you think they'll pay us ten million dollars for your safe return?"

"Ten million—that's ridiculous!"

The bearded man slapped him across the mouth. "Shut up! We'll decide whether it's ridiculous or not!"

Spacer was silent as the limousine wove through the afternoon traffic and presently reached the outskirts of the city. Just south of Kiffissia, along a deserted stretch of highway, the car stopped long enough to deposit the driver, George, at the side of the road. "Don't be in a hurry about reporting this," the bearded man warned. "Walk slow!" He laughed and closed the door, signaling his man to drive on. He rode in the front seat now, leaving the third man in the back with Spacer.

"My name is Kudia," he told Spacer at one point. "I am what they call an urban guerrilla."

"Nice to meet you," Spacer said. The other two remained silent.

After they'd driven a bit longer they came to a farmhouse where they changed cars. The American limousine was driven into a low shed attached to the barn, and Kudia, Spacer, and the other two men continued their journey in a little Italian car. "They may have helicopters up by now looking for us," Kudia explained. He switched

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on the car's radio. "Let us see if you've made the late news."

Spacer listened for some minutes to a program of traditional Greek music and then heard an announcer come on with the six o'clock news. He was the first item: "The Athens manager of the American electronics firm, Conco International, was kidnaped a few hours ago by terrorists who seized his limousine and forced the driver out on a suburban road. Police report that Charles Spacer, 46, was taken at gunpoint by three men who said they would demand a ten-million-dollar ransom for his safe release."

Kudia chuckled and snapped off the radio. "Very good! You are famous already, Mr. Spacer."

"I seem to be."

They drove in silence a while longer, finally turning up a steep mountain road. Presently they reached a cabin that was all but invisible from below. The inside was sparsely furnished with a few tables and plain wooden chairs. A cheap wind-up alarm clock sat on one table next to an ashtray. There was a small kitchen and a bedroom with two bunk beds that looked most uncomfortable. Spacer sighed and hoped he wouldn't be there long.

Shortly after dark he heard another car drive up and park outside the cabin. Kudia drew his gun and went to the door, then lowered it when he saw the new arrival. A slim man with gray hair, perhaps ten years older than Spacer, entered the room. His name was Colman King and he extended his hand to Spacer.

"We're right on target so far," he said with a smile. "How does it feel being kidnaped and held for a ten-million-dollar ransom?"

Spacer returned the smile and shook Colman King's hand. "You'd just better hope they don't decide I'm worth that much and pay it!"

The bearded Kudia produced a bottle of red wine and they sat around the table with it. The other two were sent outside for guard duty. "They know little English," Kudia said, "but I don't take chances."

Colman King nodded appreciatively. "Fine. You do well with the details, Kudia. What about the limousine?"

"Hidden in a shed on my sister's farm. We'll take it out later and abandon it in a ditch somewhere."

"Wipe it clean of fingerprints."

The Greek chuckled. "Do you need to tell me such things?"

"I just don't want any slip-ups," King said. He glanced nervously at Spacer and then back at Kudia. "You understand what your job

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is? To maintain this hideout for a period of one month, and to be here waiting when Spacer returns. Then we will go through the charade of his release or escape, depending on circumstances. Agreed?"

"Agreed." Kudia smiled and stroked his beard. "You want me to leave while you two talk?"

"We'll leave," Colman King decided. "Come on, Charles. We'll go for a walk." He had the intelligence agent's typical aversion to talking in enclosed areas.

Outside, under a moonlit sky, Spacer asked, "How much does Kudia know?"

"Only what he has to. He has no knowledge of your destination or mission. But we're paying him well."

"Exactly what is my destination and mission? And why was this kidnaping hoax necessary?"

"You must disappear for a period up to one month long. It's well known that you go home to your wife in the States at vacation time, and a fake hospitalization could have been checked too easily. Neither the press nor your wife can check on a kidnaping very well. In a month's time you'll be back, a hero of sorts, and Conco will even transfer you back home, I imagine."

"What am I to do during this disappearance?"

"Some highly classified electronics installation in the Middle East."

"Planting a bug in an Arab's bedroom?" Spacer grumbled. "You've got half a hundred agents for that sort of work."

"This is a new kind of bug," King said, taking his hand from his pocket to show Spacer a tiny silicon chip. "You know the sort the Russians are using at our Moscow embassy? With batteries recharged by bursts of microwave bombardment?"

"I'm familiar with them."

"This is a vastly improved model. Provided the chip is installed properly, it can be recharged by a microwave burst of just a few seconds each day. Also impossible to detect."

"And I'm the only one who can do it?"

"You're the best electronics brain in the entire Agency. You know that, Charles. It was either you or a contract employee, and the targets are far too sensitive for a contract."

"Tell me."

"The chiefs of the OPEC oil nations."

"How do I get in?"

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"You'll be disguised, with a cover story that varies from country to country. We estimate the entire operation will take three to four weeks. You'll return here, to this cabin, when you've completed the assignment."

"How much?" Spacer asked.

"The usual bonus for a hazardous mission, deposited to your Swiss account."

"Fine. What's my first stop?"

"You'll contact a man named Murat in Istanbul. He'll take care of your disguise and cover story."

"Do I leave in the morning?" Spacer asked, thinking of those bunk beds.

"You leave now. You'll be in Turkey by morning."

"I'm ready."

"What about your wife?"

"I hope she'll shed a few tears, but I doubt it."

As they walked to the car Colman King added, "By the way, the code name for this assignment is Enigma."

Charles Spacer met the man named Murat on the Golden Horn Bridge in Istanbul the following afternoon. He was a short shabby man who might have made his living at one of a dozen grubby, not-quite-legal occupations. Spacer had known men like him in many cities around the world.

"So you are the one who wants to be an Arab," Murat said, examining Spacer's sharp features and high cheekbones. "It will not be easy, but I think I can do it."

After a day of work Spacer had to admit the man was an artist of sorts. Looking at himself in a mirror, he could detect only a faint resemblance to his former self. Murat also produced the necessary passport and papers. Such things were not difficult to come by in Istanbul.

When he was ready to move on, Spacer asked, "Will I see you again on my return journey?"

"It will not be necessary. The disguise and passport will aid your return to Greece."

Spacer was surprised the man knew he'd come from Greece and wondered if he'd recognized him from the two-year-old photograph the newspapers were running. He could only assume King had made the necessary arrangements.

He boarded a commercial jet for Iran the following morning and

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accomplished the first step of his mission without a hitch. The electronic listening devices were small and amazingly versatile. He checked out the operation and the recharging procedure, made contact with an agent on the scene, then moved on to the next location.

By the end of the first week he noticed that news of the kidnaping of Charles Spacer in Greece had all but disappeared from the foreign press. Conco International was negotiating on the ransom demand, but it seemed obvious several weeks or months would pass before they agreed to pay anything at all for his safe return. King had been right about that much, at least.

He finished his assignment in 19 days and headed back to Athens. It had gone even better than he'd thought possible.

Still traveling under the false passport, he landed at Ellinikon Airport south of Athens and rented a car for the final leg of the journey. He avoided driving through Athens itself, skirting the city on its eastern edge as he drove north toward the mountain cabin where Kudia would be waiting. He'd picked up a newspaper at the airport, but there was no mention of his continuing captivity. That would change by tomorrow, he decided with a smile. He'd be front-page news again once he was released.

It was late afternoon when he started up the mountain road to the cabin. It would be best, he decided, if they dropped him somewhere on the main highway, or made up a story explaining his escape. His story to the police about a captivity of nearly three weeks would have to be necessarily vague, and he didn't want them finding the cabin so they could ask embarrassing questions about it. He'd been kept blindfolded most of the time, of course—that would be a likely explanation for any lack of detail. Blindfolded and perhaps drugged, too. He'd have to be careful about any stories of recent drugging, though. Doctors could easily check a sample of his urine.

The car he'd arrived in was parked outside the cabin and he pulled up behind it. He assumed they'd spotted him already, so he entered through the unlocked front door without knocking.

It was the smell that hit him first.

Then he saw the bodies.

One was sprawled behind an overturned table, his chest and neck peppered with bullet holes. Another was on the kitchen floor, the back of his head blown away. He caught a glimpse of Kudia propped in a corner, his black beard red with matted blood. From the odor he guessed they'd been dead about two days, and the bullet patterns indicated a sten gun or other automatic weapon.

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Apparently none of the victims had a chance to reach the weapons in the cabin. That suggested the killer or killers had been known to them. He stood for a moment longer, trying to hold his breath against the stench. The only sounds in the cabin were the buzzing of flies and the ticking of the alarm clock. It still showed the correct time. Spacer left the cabin and carefully closed the door behind him.

All the way down the mountain he tried to decide what it meant. Was he to have been one of the victims too, or were the deaths unrelated to his mission? Above all, what was he to do now?

It was almost dark when he drove into Athens and parked the rented car in Syntagma Square near the King George Hotel. It was the city's tourist center and he knew there was safety in the crowded streets. He found a public telephone in the hotel lobby and phoned the embassy.

"Good evening, American Embassy," a woman's voice answered.

"Colman King, please."

"We have no one of that name, sir."

"It's very important."

"I'm sorry, sir. There is no Colman King here."

"Do you know where I can reach him?"

"I'm sorry, sir," she repeated, and the connection was broken.

Never before had he been unable to reach King when he needed to. He left the car where it was and took one of the city's ubiquitous taxis to the nearby embassy building. He left the taxi down the block and headed on foot for the glow of embassy lights. He paused just a moment, looking for cars, and crossed the street. Then, without warning, something struck the pavement not three feet ahead of him. There had been no sound but he knew it was a bullet. Someone had fired at him with a silenced gun.

Spacer turned and ran, reaching the shadow of an alley as a second bullet thudded into the wall nearby. He paused, panting, trying to spot the gunman. But there was no sign of anyone across the street.

Someone had known he'd try to reach the embassy. Someone was trying to stop that.

For the first time he considered the possibility that Colman King and the Agency might want him dead.

A neat conclusion to the mission. Kudia and his men dead. Charles Spacer dead. No one left alive to talk, ever.

He made his way back through the alleys of the city to the place where he'd left the rented car. Certain now that he'd shaken any

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follower, he drove to the luxury high-rise where he maintained his Athens apartment. He'd always liked the building because from its terrace one could look down at the 15 remaining columns of the Temple of Olympian Zeus across the street. It was a view to remind him how fragile were the monuments of any civilization.

Now, as he drove by the entrance, he cursed the security precautions that dictated the necessity for a 24-hour doorman. He would never be allowed into the building in his present disguise, and if he presented himself as Charles Spacer the doorman would surely raise an uproar and spread the word of his safe return. He didn't want that quite yet, not till he had a better idea who his friends and enemies were.

The way he looked at it, there was only one place that was safe for him.

He turned the car around and headed for it.

She opened the door boldly, without caution, because Rina had never been cautious about anything in her entire life. Then, seeing too late the unfamiliar face before her, she tried to close it. Spacer's foot kicked out to hold it open. "It's me, Rina," he said quickly. "Charles."

"My God!"

He slipped inside and closed the door behind him. "This is a wig and makeup," he exclaimed. "If I can use your bathroom I'll wash it off."

"Charles, what—?"

"Explanations in due time. Let me get to look normal first."

When he came out of the bathroom ten minutes later and presented his well-scrubbed face to her, he knew the time had come for explanations. And if Colman King thought he was breaking security, to hell with him. "I wasn't kidnaped," he began as she handed him a cup of steaming coffee. "Not really. And I could use a good stiff drink more than this coffee."

"You weren't kidnaped! But what happened? It was in all the papers. Your wife's been frantic."

He thought about his wife for the first time in days. "She didn't come to Athens, did she?"

"No, but she's been burning up the transatlantic lines, demanding action. I think she still loves you, Charles."

Spacer snorted. "She loves being the center of attention, that's all. Having her husband kidnaped by terrorists is the best thing

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that's happened to her in years. She probably even made the nightly TV news programs."

"Forget about her and tell me about yourself. Where in hell have you been for three weeks, and why the disguise?" She handed him the drink he'd requested. "I've been worried sick about you."

"I was on a confidential mission that I can't really talk about."

"For Conco?"

"No."

"My God, Charles, are you a spy or something?" The idea amused her.

"I'm hardly a spy in the traditional sense, but I suppose I've worked with some people who are."

"You're serious, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You work for the C.I.A.?"

"I work for the government, on occasions when they need me. They needed me these past three weeks and there was no way to explain my absence, so they invented the kidnaping story. I came back today and I was to have escaped or been freed by my captors. Except that something went wrong. Some people were killed."

"By you?"

"No. I don't know who killed them. But an attempt was made on my life too. I had no place else to go but here."

She shook her head and went to pour herself a drink. "Strange—I thought I'd heard your whole life story by this time, but I didn't know the most important thing about you."

"That's not the most important thing."

"Who's trying to kill you?" she asked. "The Russians?"

He smiled at that. "There are no Russians involved in this. Frankly, I don't know who the enemy is."

"Maybe you're being double-crossed by your own side."

"Such things have happened," he admitted.

"What do you plan to do?"

He shrugged. "The safest thing would be to walk up to the nearest Athens policeman and tell him I'd escaped from my captors. Maybe that's what I'll have to do, for my own safety. But I'd like to find out what's going on first. At this point almost anything I do might be a mistake."

"Was coming here a mistake?"

He finished his drink. "I hope not."

Later, a bit after midnight, he decided to have another try at

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calling the embassy. He asked for the night-duty officer and when that man came on he repeated his request for Colman King.

"I don't know—" the voice began.

"It's very important. Tell him it's Enigma calling."

"Just a moment, please."

It was more than a moment, and Spacer was about to hang up when the man came back on. "Could you call in the morning, please? After nine o'clock? I don't seem to be able to rouse anyone now."

Spacer hung up in disgust. "What will you do now?" Rina asked.

"I'm not going to wait till nine o'clock and call again," he told her. "I guess I'll go find that policeman after all."

"Now? Tonight?"

"What choice do I have? The story of my escape might seem more likely in the middle of the night, anyway."

He waited a while longer, staring out the window at the night shapes of the city. Then, shortly before one o'clock, he left her and went downstairs. He'd prepared his story well, even chafing his wrists a bit to leave marks that looked like rope burns. And he ripped the sleeve of his shirt. These were not the same clothes he'd been wearing when he was abducted, but after three weeks the kidnapers could be expected to give him something else to wear. He would be vague about the cabin's location, and if it was never found so much the better.

He stepped into the street and headed in the direction of Syntagma Square, where he knew there were police on duty all night. Before he'd gone 20 feet a car turned into the street and pulled up beside him. There was no chance to run before the car door opened and a voice commanded, "Get in, Spacer!"

It was Colman King, seated in back alone. A man Spacer didn't know was driving. Spacer obeyed and the car drove off at once. "I've been trying to reach you," he told King. "How'd you find me here?"

"The call was traced, of course," King said casually. "What do you think you're doing now?"

"Looking for a policeman to explain my escape. I want to come back to life, King."

"You were supposed to go to the cabin."

"Everyone's dead at the cabin. Didn't you know?"

King frowned and said nothing for a few moments. "There've been some complications," he admitted at last. "But you won't make things any better by running to the police. You need to stay under cover till we get this thing sorted out."

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"I tried coming to the embassy tonight and someone took a shot at me. Who was it, King?"

The older man shrugged. "Enemies. There are always enemies."

"Someone who knew about my mission? Then why wasn't I killed sooner? Why'd they let me complete it and get back here?"

"It might have nothing to do with your mission. It might have more to do with Conco International."

"What's Conco got to do with this?"

"Something happened that we didn't expect. I told you there'd been complications."

"What sort of complications?"

"Conco paid the ransom."

Spacer stared out the car window, unable to quite believe his ears. He turned to Colman King. "You mean they paid ten million dollars for my release?"

"No, no—we think they paid about a million and a half. It was done a couple of days ago, very quietly. No one's supposed to know about it, but we found out."

"Who the hell was it paid to? Who has the money?"

"That's one of the problems. We don't know. They were contacted with the lower ransom figure, coupled with threat of your death if it wasn't paid. The money was dropped off sometime Tuesday night, here in the city. We believe it was left somewhere in the Parthenon."

"Why didn't you stop them from paying it?" Spacer demanded.

"How? By admitting the kidnaping was a hoax?"

He could see the spot King had been in. "But surely you could have stalled them until my return."

"That might have been another week for all we knew. Besides, it was out of my hands. Naturally they didn't consult me, since they didn't even know of my existence."

Spacer thought about it. "The person who picked up the ransom money and killed Kudia and the others—assuming the same person did both things—had to be someone who knew of the cabin and its location. That would seem to rule out anyone at Conco, or anyone just reading about my kidnaping in the papers."

"Yes," King agreed.

"Of course you knew about the cabin."

"And so did you," King pointed out. "Maybe you returned from the assignment a few days early and collected your own ransom."

Spacer took out the fake passport and showed him the date o

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entry stamped on it at Ellinikon Airport. "I returned this afternoon—yesterday afternoon, now. Does that convince you?"

"I wasn't making a serious accusation."

"It sounded serious to me."

"All right," Colman King said. "Let's start over and talk sensibly about this. Tell me what you found at the cabin."

"All three men had been shot by automatic weapons. None of them had guns in their hands, which probably means they were taken by surprise."

King nodded. "You mean they knew the person who killed them."

"Right. You don't sneak up on someone with a sten gun in your pocket."

"How long had they been dead?"

"I didn't examine them closely but from the condition of the bodies I'd say at least two days."

"All right," King said. "I'll drive up there in the morning and check it out. Meanwhile, I want you to stay under cover. Turning yourself in to the first policeman you found would have been foolish under the circumstances."

"Why foolish?"

"They'd think you killed Kudia and his men, of course. You couldn't tell them the kidnaping was a hoax without exposing your mission, and they'd decide you killed them to keep the ransom money for yourself."

"Seems to me you're mainly worried about the truth coming out," Spacer said. "If I follow your advice where do I go now?"

"There are places in the city where I can hide you, at least till we have time to dispose of those bodies. Then you can reappear and say you were released in return for the ransom."

"I can go back where I was. I'll be safe there."

King hesitated, then said, "Don't be too sure."

"What does that mean?"

"We have some suspicions about Katrina Collins."

Spacer felt the anger explode within him. "You didn't trace that call tonight, did you? You've known about Rina all along! You knew I was there and you probably followed me from the embassy after you took those shots at me!"

"Calm down, Charles. Of course we knew about Katrina. It's our business to know such things about our people. Think about it, will you? She's Conco's assistant controller in Athens. She could have known when the money was being assembled for the ransom pay-

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ment. She could have arranged the whole thing. She might have even contacted Kudia somehow during the ransom negotiations and killed him."

"One woman against three armed men?" Spacer snorted. "You're crazy!"

"One woman might have gotten into the cabin without arousing their suspicions."

He'd been with King long enough to know the workings of the man's mind. It had been decided—somewhere, for some reason—that Rina was to be blamed. And he couldn't let that happen.

With a sudden movement he'd barely thought out, Spacer wrenched open the car door and dove into the night. He landed hard on the gravel shoulder of the road, hearing Colman King's shout behind him. "You fool! Come back here!"

Then he was into the tall weeds, running, feeling the sting and soreness of his hands and knees where he'd landed. He knew his pants were ripped but that didn't bother him. The only important thing was getting away from Colman King and his people

And getting back to Rina somehow, before they reached her.

He ran on through the night, heading back toward the center of Athens, avoiding the main streets where people might still be out walking after one in the morning. He felt like a fugitive now, running, hiding at each approach of a car, keeping in the shadows.

Why did he do it? he asked himself. Why had he ever started, all those years ago when he was just out of college?

Why? That was the real enigma.

At one point, running down an alley where the old and the new city touched and mingled, it occurred to Spacer that Colman King had never once alluded to his mission in the Middle East. Either he'd already been informed of the results, or he no longer cared.

He went up the rusty fire escape at the back of her building and wakened her by tapping gently on the window pane. When she opened the window he slipped inside. "Leave the lights off," he warned. "Colman King was waiting for me outside. I got away from him but he'll come here looking for me."

"Why should he?" she asked, examining his bloody palms by the moonlight streaming through the window.

"He wants to involve you, Rina. Apparently he's known about us for some time. He even thinks you might have killed those men and taken the ransom money."

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"Me? Is he insane?"

"No, just clever. Maybe it's his way of trying to neutralize me. Whatever his game, you're in danger. We have to get out of here together."

"Now?"

He nodded, holding her close. "Pack a small bag and we'll go down the fire escape."

She hurried, and minutes later he was helping her out the window. She paused on the fire escape, turned to him, and said, "Do you know what you're doing, Charles? What if King is right about me?"

"That's the chance I'll take."

They reached the ground and Rina asked, "Where are we going?"

"I have a rented car just a couple of blocks away. If we're lucky we can drive up to Lamia for a few days and—"

His words were cut short by a metallic sound that Spacer knew all too well. It was the slide on an automatic weapon being pulled back to load the first cartridge into the chamber. He froze, staring into the darkness ahead. "King? Is that you?"

"It's not King," a voice said.

A familiar voice.

The bearded Kudia, back from the dead, stepped out of the shadows holding a submachine gun pointed at them.

Spacer heard Rina's sharp intake of breath at his side. "What does this mean, Kudia?" Spacer asked quietly.

"It means I have to kill you both. I should have finished you at the cabin earlier, but I saw a chance to convince the world I was dead. Those two fools working for me were no problem. I killed them as soon as I learned that Conco had agreed to pay the ransom."

"I thought you were working for Colman King."

"He hired me for a few thousand dollars. I should be content with that when there were millions to be made? After you left on your mission I opened my own negotiations with Conco. We finally agreed on a price of a million and a half for your return. I killed those two and collected the money myself. Then I hid out near the cabin waiting for your return. I could watch the road with binoculars, and when I saw your car I went in there with the bodies and sat in the corner with blood on my beard. I guessed that after seeing the other two you wouldn't examine my body too closely, or linger too long."

"And if I had?"

Kudia shrugged. "You would have died a few hours sooner. I

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wanted you alive to report my death to Colman King. After you left I set fire to the cabin and the other two bodies. I could have been away from here with the money, but then I remembered something you would have seen."

And it came to Spacer then. "The clock! A cheap wind-up alarm clock wouldn't be keeping perfect time if it hadn't been wound in a couple of days. It would have stopped or at least slowed down. If the clock had been wound, that meant someone was still alive at the cabin. Certainly an outside killer wouldn't come back to wind it."

"Exactly," Kudia agreed. "I knew you would remember it sooner or later, so I had to kill you. I tried first at the embassy, then followed you here. I would have gotten you when you left earlier, but King got to you first. You escaped from him, so now it's my turn again."

"You don't have to kill us," Spacer said.

"But I do! I must make it safely across the border."

"*Kudia!*" a voice shouted then, and he half turned, bringing up the machine gun. Spacer dove to one side, pulling Rina with him. There was a chatter of gunfire, very brief, then it was over.

Colman King helped him to his feet. "We knew you'd come back here," he said. "I was in time to hear it all."

Spacer walked over to where Kudia lay. "He made it across the border, but maybe not the border he'd planned on."

Rina came up to him and held his arm. "Will you be going home now?" she asked.

He knew he'd never be able to answer that question for himself. "I don't know," he replied. "I'll do whatever they want me to." One of King's men knelt by Kudia's body to search his pockets. There was still the ransom money to be recovered.

"Why, Charles? Why do you do it?" she asked. It was the same question he'd asked himself earlier. "Is this the sort of life you want, being shot at in alleys?"

He moistened his lips and looked again at the body on the ground. It was something he'd never admitted until now. "Yes," he answered quietly.

"Q"

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*This is the 555th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a coal-mining story written, for a good reason, with absolute authenticity . . .*

*The author, Lee Schultz, is in her mid-thirties, married, and has four children. Her work background is multifaceted: accounting, catering, real estate, office services, construction, and law. At present she works "on the surface crew" of the same coal mine "where her husband is an underground miner"—hence the authenticity mentioned above. Her hobbies: spinning, weaving, needlework, gardening, small animal farming, alternative energy (she received a permit recently to distill fuel alcohol) . . . When will she find the time to write all the plots that have been "lurking in her head for years"? . . .*

# TUNNEL RAT

by LEE SCHULTZ

My troubles all start the day they hire a woman to do my job. Sure, she works on a different crew, but she does the same work in the same place as me. Well, I *guess* you could say we do the same work.

See, I work for the Table Mountain Mining Company as a tunnel rat. The coal comes out of the mine on a conveyor belt which drops it into a tube, which drops the coal into this big pile. The fine stuff falls straight down, the pebble-sized coal bounces a little farther on, and so on until the great big chunks roll past to the end of the pile. Under this mountain of coal is a tunnel with a thick ironplate roof with holes in it. Each hole is under a different-sized coal, and has a funnel-type chute and a door.

My job—and hers—is to regulate these doors according to the size of coal they want down at the preparation plant. Say they want

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medium-sized, well, I open the first door halfway, letting out some fine stuff, then open the third door halfway, dropping the medium-sized coal onto the belt, which carries it through the tunnel outside and drops it into a belly-dump truck. The trucks take it on down the hill, where the coal is processed and loaded into rail cars.

That part of the job is okay—the part I hate is cleaning up. The conveyor belt doesn't always run straight, and sometimes it slips to one side and spills coal on the floor, and I have to shovel it back onto the belt above my head. That's a lot of work, and I have to admit I can think of lots of things I'd rather be doing.

I have it made before *she* comes. I sit up in my warm, cozy metal shack, catch forty winks, or read a "Playboy," or just watch for deer out the window. Sometimes I go back inside the tunnel to check the doors, and if there's a little spillage, well, the man on the other shift cleans up every Friday and blows out all the dust that accumulates on the rollers and walls and then spreads a layer of fine rock dust all over. This is because coal dust can cause an explosion and the Feds are pretty strict about accumulated dust and rock dusting. So if the guy has a little extra to shovel up, who's gonna know? He's close to retirement, so I figure he won't complain.

And then the other guy retires and they hire this—this *woman*—to take his place. Oho, I think, this oughta last a long time. Anyone knows a woman can't do as much work as a man. So I just take it easy and leave her little messes to clean up. She doesn't say too much. I guess she knows the company doesn't want her there, but because of the equal opportunity jazz they have to hire her. But then one day her boss, old "Bigmouth" Barrett, goes into the tunnel and sees the mess I left for her, and the next day he jumps up in my hair and does the Mexican Hat Dance. He hollers at me about doing my job right, and while he's at it he throws in a coupla snide remarks about at least *she* shows up for work every day. Jeez, anybody'd think he *liked* having a broad around.

So the months go by and she gets cockier every day. One time she even leaves a big mess in the tunnel and writes me a note telling me she's tired of cleaning up after me and from now on what I left, she'd leave. The nerve! All the time I've had this job nobody's pulled that kind of stuff. Well, you better believe it burns me good, so I tell my boss about it. For some reason he's not at all sympathetic.

She starts putting more pressure on me, and when the Big Boss catches me napping, the business really hits the fan. I'm on edge all the time, and I miss more work because of my nerves. They don't

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like that much, but I don't see how they can fire a guy because he's sick. Can they?

So the final blow comes when the Big Boss calls me into his office and says, "Jack, we've had too many complaints about your absenteeism, your work—or lack of it—and your sleeping on the job. The next time—the *very* next time you get caught sleeping, or not doing your job, or miss work without a doctor's slip, you might as well start looking for another job. And good luck!"

Then he gives me a funny look and says, "We put old whatsername up there on the other shift to see if it would shame you into doing a better job. But I guess you just don't care if a woman does your job better than you do."

My jaw drops, and I really get bent. But by the time I figure out what to say, he's left. I can't believe what I just heard. And that's when I decide she's got to go.

I spend the next week looking over the tunnel trying to figure out a way to get rid of her so I can get back to things like they were before she came. I consider the escape tube, but it's built too strong for sabotage, and obviously it has to be an "accident." I finally settle on the Number 4 door. I never use it, because it raises too much dust and I don't like wearing a dust respirator. It makes funny marks on my face. But *she* uses Number 4 quite often because the wash-plant operator on her crew likes the big stuff. And besides, it's already weakened some from the time we got a big rock stuck in it and had to blast it loose. We over-estimated there, and the steelplate roof definitely bulges.

It takes me two days to loosen the bolts holding the chute to the roof. The way I figure it, when she comes to work and opens the door, the force of those big hunks of coal and rock dropping down onto the door will knock the chute from the roof, leaving a five-foot opening for the coal to come through. I figure it will take all of about ten seconds to completely bury her under all those big chunks. And who's to say it's not an accident? After all, those bolts are under a lot of stress and could easily be vibrated loose. And they already have wrench marks on them from when they were installed.

So Thursday I lay the trap. I'm humming my favorite Country Western tune as I climb the steps to my little shack. After Thursday things will be like they were before. I'm so involved in my little plot I don't even hear my boss come up the steps until he says, "Hey, Jack, we're going to run lump today, so you go on back and open up Number Four. I'll wait here for you."

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 556th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Callie's second husband, Joe, was the only one in the family who liked mushrooms . . .*

*The author, Bonnie J. Cissell, is in her early thirties. She is married and the mother of three boys. She was born and raised in Chicago, and attended Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Her two main hobbies are reading and foxhunting. (A foxhunting story next?) . . .*

# GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

**by BONNIE J. CISSELL**

Funerals are at best uncomfortable occasions. The endless condolences are meaningless to the truly bereaved.

"Just be glad he didn't linger."

"At least he's at peace now."

Until today it was the element of grief that made me uneasy at funerals. I always felt like a peeping Tom observing emotions that shouldn't have to be displayed in public.

Today, however, I found it is even more disconcerting to peep into someone's psyche and see not grief, not even regret, but relief—sheer unadulterated relief.

No doubt about it, Joe Haynes was no good, and in a small town like Waldron everybody knew it. Still, one could hardly say to the less than grieving widow, "Congratulations!" Or worse, to stutter around trying to say *something* good about the deceased and not being able to, because the only good thing about him was that he was dead. Of course, there were some diplomatic souls around mouthing the usual utterances.

"My, they did a good job on him."

"Doesn't he look natural?"

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Moving away from the family, however, the overheard snatches of conversation changed in character, becoming less conventional but more honest.

"Poor Callie won't have to put up with Joe's drunken rages any more."

"Bet Callie won't have any more bruises from 'bumping into furniture.' "

"Donald will probably do a lot better in school now."

"You know, I can't help but feel it's for the best. I mean, Laurie's getting to be such a pretty girl now and so—mature for her age. I often worried about her being home alone with her stepfather when Callie was working."

"Maybe little Martha will stop having those nightmares now. And honestly, for a child of four to cling to her mother the way she does isn't natural. She was such a good baby. It just seemed like she changed when Callie married Joe. Even a two-year-old is sensitive to atmosphere."

"I know it was hard on Callie when Bill died and left her with three little ones, but still she could have managed much better on her own. Joe certainly didn't part with his money very easily. His salary went for his beer, guns, gambling debts, and women."

"My Jimmy went home with Donald one day after school and he said the minute Joe came in he started in on Donald. Just said awful things to Donald right in front of Jimmy. Then he began to push Donald around and Jimmy got scared and came home. I don't approve of these children nowadays who are disrespectful of their parents, but when Donald said he hated Joe, I just couldn't blame him."

"Well, it seems funny to me that they did an autopsy. Don't you think that's unusual? I know he died suddenly but—"

"I heard it was food poisoning. Of course, they all ate supper together and nobody else got sick."

"Was Joe insured for much? I mean, he might be doing more for Callie and the kids by dying than he ever did alive."

"You know, I read about a fourteen-year-old girl in California who killed her stepfather. Said he wouldn't let her date. That's such an emotional age. Not that Laurie resembles that girl in any way. I don't even know what made me think of it."

"Let's see, Donald is twelve, now, isn't he? Boys at that age are so protective of their mothers. Joe was pretty rough on the kid too, wasn't he?"

"Callie's holding up well. Of course, she always was the type to

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keep everything inside. I often wondered what would happen if Joe ever pushed her too far."

As a lawyer in a small town, I have to attend funerals when the deceased is either a friend or a client. Callie and her first husband were my friends; Joe was a client. Unfortunately, Joe is gone but not forgotten.

In rural communities gossip and rumor are as common as meat and potatoes. Nobody liked Joe, but nobody forgot that his death wasn't quite natural. The autopsy showed he died from a lethal quantity of poisonous mushrooms which were in the salad. Joe was the only one in the family who liked mushrooms, but the thing was that he knew what to pick.

The whole Haynes family had gone mushroom-picking that day. Callie had carried a large basket and everybody put their pickings into it. Callie and Martha stayed together most of the time, Callie collecting mushrooms and Martha collecting rocks and flowers and other childish treasures. When they arrived home, Callie voluntarily gave half of the basket of mushrooms to her next-door neighbor who is still alive and kicking, so that seems to prove the mushrooms in the basket were okay. Laurie and Donald had been dropped off at school before arriving home and didn't get back from the ball game until after Joe was taken ill.

I decided to visit Callie and see if she needed any advice, friendly or professional. I rang the bell and a little blonde head peeked around the door.

"Hello, Martha. May I come in?" I asked.

"Yes, but Mom's upstairs. She'll be down in a minute."

Martha looked me over consideringly. "Do you think Joe's in heaven?" she asked with the innocence of childhood.

I decided a lie would be best, so I said, "I'm sure he is."

Martha thought for a minute, then smiled and said, "I'm glad, because then he knows I fixed those mushrooms 'specially for him. I knew I picked the right ones 'cause one day I heard Mom talking to herself and she said those were the kind she'd like to feed him. So I picked them and washed them all by myself when no one was looking. I wanted to surprise Joe. Someone said he got what he deserved. I guess that means the mushrooms, huh?"

"Q"

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 557th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a short short-short . . . The author, James C. Lamanna, Jr., is in his mid-fifties, married, and has two sons. Formerly a newspaper reporter and radio news director, he has a special interest in "mini-fiction" . . .*

# NEIGHBORS ARE COMPLAINING

**by JAMES C. LAMANNA, Jr.**

The dispatcher chuckled when he put out the call for me to investigate gunfire at the home of the former police chief. It wasn't the first time. Neighbors had been complaining for weeks about shots being fired in the basement of old Chief Hansen's house.

The retired chief answered the door in his usual unassuming manner. It had been a wonder to me that he had ever been head of the police department. He was a subdued sort of fellow who always struck me as totally lacking in aggressiveness.

"I know, I know, the neighbors are complaining," the chief said as he led me into the kitchen of his one-family house. "Want some coffee, Officer Martin?"

"No, thanks, Chief," I replied. "I just want to ask you to please knock off the shooting."

"I really didn't think my target practise was so disturbing," he complained. "Come with me."

He led me to the stairs that went down to a rather large basement. At one end a bull's-eye target was hung. The wall behind it was heavily padded.

The chief picked up a .22 revolver from a table and aimed at the target. I noticed a gooey substance on the target and a number of black specks adhering to it. The chief ticked off two quick shots.

He turned to me. "Did I hurt anybody?" he asked.

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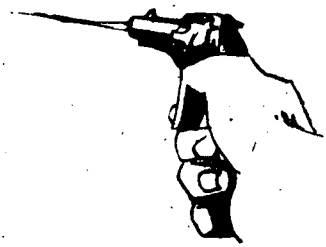
"No," I replied, "but the neighbors are nervous."

As he put the gun down, I walked closer to the target. "Chief, what's all the goo?"

"Syrup," he answered. "I slap it on to attract flies. You see, those specks on there are flies. They get caught in the syrup and I shoot them."

I looked at the old man. "You shoot flies?"

"That's right, Officer Martin. They always said I was the kind of guy who wouldn't hurt a fly. Well, by gum, they were wrong."



## DETECTIVERSE

### *CONGEALED WEAPON*

*by WILLIAM F. SMITH*

Since he didn't trust banks, recluse Uncle Fred
Kept all of his cash in a large waterbed.
One dark night in winter his sole nephew Pete
Sneaked into Fred's cottage and turned off the heat.
The mercury dropped below Fahrenheit two;
The money stayed green, but the uncle turned blue.
This method of murder, of course, was not nice;
The victim expired when his bed turned to ice.

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 558th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Mrs. Martin's story is told by a high-school student, a sensitive girl feeling deeply the loss of her best friend . . .*

*Carol Myers Martin received all her formal education at Appomattox High School in Virginia. She and her husband "have had a pretty good partnership for 23 years . . . and have one son, 18 years old." Mrs. Martin is a farmwife. "That's not quite the same as being a housewife; it involves more, like delivering a calf in an emergency, helping in the hayfield, helping take off a crop of honey, and so on." Her hobbies are crocheting and reading, although she doesn't really consider reading a hobby. "It is the source of my education, entertainment, and at times, survival" . . .*

# DEATH BY DEFAULT

**by CAROL MYERS MARTIN**

Hey, I just added a new word to my vocabulary. I was looking up something—I'm working on my term paper for English—and this word sort of caught my eye. Default. It means like failing to do something you should have.

Lacey's been dead two weeks now. I sure miss her a lot. I think I always will.

She was my friend, my closest, best friend in the whole world. At least she was before.

I shouldn't end a sentence like that, hanging. Before what?

Well, before she wasn't Lacey any more.

Her Mom and Dad didn't know she was on drugs. Not for a long time. Then they did know, but they didn't know what to do about it.

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"We were so helpless." I can hear her Mom and Dad downstairs talking to mine. "We were so helpless," her Mom repeats. "We saw that she was changing, you know? She just seemed to lose interest in everything she used to love. Her grades, she'd always done so well and we were so proud of her. All at once she was failing in every subject.

"We tried to get her to go to the doctor. We thought she needed vitamins, maybe she was anemic or something."

"She told us she wouldn't go and we couldn't make her," Lacey's Dad says heavily. "So what could we do? She was a sixteen-year-old *woman,* for Pete's sake! We couldn't just bundle her up and *take* her!"

Her Mom sighed. "She'd get so mad at the very mention of a doctor, we finally stopped bringing it up."

"That was another thing." Lacey's Dad again. "She'd got so cross and bad-tempered. Hostile. It wasn't like her, but then I'd read that all adolescent girls get moody at times. I thought it was a phase we'd just have to live with."

He was quiet a moment, then went on, "But those failing grades! I thought I could do something about them. I mean, I knew Lacey could do better, so I grounded her. Took away all her privileges." Suddenly he sobbed, a terrible, dry, despairing sob. "I was going to make her do better or know the reason why!"

I got up and shut the door to my room then; I didn't want to hear any more.

Lacey's Dad didn't make her do better. But it wasn't long before he knew the reason why.

Lacey was hooked.

Her Mom found a few pills, and then some more.

At first they kept quiet. They were afraid to confront Lacey. She had a right to her privacy, and if she knew they'd been snooping, she'd hate them. They couldn't take that.

They cut off her allowance, though—as part of her punishment for the failing grades, they told her.

They told each other that would solve the problem. Without money she couldn't feed her habit, so it would have to disappear.

They didn't know she didn't need her allowance any more. She'd found a way to earn her own money.

I knew. Lacey was a pusher.

I honestly don't know who turned Lacey onto drugs or where she met him or her. I don't think it was anyone at school, but I knew

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she was pushing and she was turning on other kids to harder and harder stuff, and they were turning on more kids.

I tried to talk to her a couple of times. I mean, we'd been best friends since Junior High. I thought she'd listen to me.

Afterward, when I finally stopped crying, I told myself it wasn't Lacey talking. It was the drugs.

I thought about telling somebody what I knew. There is a hotline in our town for just this kind of thing, no questions asked. I could've talked to my Mom and Dad, our pastor maybe, or—there were a lot of people I could've gone to who'd have known what to do. I guess. I mean, *somebody* has to go, don't they?

I never found out. I was afraid to tell. I didn't know what might happen and I didn't want to get Lacey in trouble.

Besides, I mean, I wasn't the only one who knew. They had to know at school. I mean, kids were getting stoned in the middle of the day. They had to know what was happening.

But maybe they were like me. No one wanted to be the one to say anything. Or maybe they didn't know as much as I thought they did.

I mean, there are a lot of kids in our school, a lot goes on. Nobody can watch them all.

Finally, though, Lacey had got in such bad shape that her folks knew they had to do something. They talked to this guy who told them about this place where Lacey could get all the counseling and help she needed.

They made all the arrangements to take her.

But Lacey wouldn't go.

Shutting my door hadn't been enough.

Lacey's Mom's voice floated up through the register in my floor.

"She told us she wouldn't go and we couldn't force her. If we tried, she said she'd run away."

"So, of course, that was that," her Dad added. "We couldn't take a chance on her running away." He drew a shuddering breath. "She was only a *child—sixteen* years old! What would've become of her!"

Lacey didn't come home one night. Or the next morning.

Her Mom and Dad walked the floor, crying and praying. They didn't call the police.

"Lacey would have hated us," I heard her mother sob.

It was a farmer who found her. He was going to check his mailbox and saw her, a little, cold, balled-up heap beside the dirt road.

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She was dead.

The police investigated. It looked like murder.

They found some of her friends. They were pretty frightened and sorry, but they swore they'd had nothing to do with her death.

Yeah, there'd been a party. Everybody was popping, anything and everything. Sure, there'd been lots of alcohol, too. After a while no one noticed what was happening to anyone else.

When someone finally noticed that Lacey was dead, those still able to feel anything got scared. They decided to haul her out to that lonely country road and dump her.

"Somebody'll find her," one of the boys said, "and, man, she wasn't hurtin' no more."

That much they admitted. As for Lacey's death, they were clean. They certainly hadn't made Lacey take those pills. She did that of her own sweet, free will.

Well, that was true. Sort of.

When all the reports were in, it was shown beyond all doubt that "death resulted from a self-administered overdose of drugs in combination with a quantity of alcohol." There was a list of half a dozen kinds of drugs found in Lacey's body.

No one murdered Lacey.

She took those pills herself. Only, like I said in the beginning, Lacey wasn't Lacey then. She wasn't anybody. She was breathing and her heart was beating. But she wasn't living. She was reacting—to a bunch of chemicals.

The rest of us don't have that excuse.

I mean, we knew what was happening to Lacey when she didn't realize it herself. She couldn't do anything to help herself. We didn't do anything to help her.

Is this how it's going to be from here on in? I mean, it seems to me there are fewer and fewer of us who can "do something." And we aren't. Are we just going to leave it that way?

We talked about alliteration in English not long ago. Using words that begin with the same sound together. It's pretty in poetry, but death by default—oh, God, what an awful, awful sound!

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

**JOHN C. BOLAND**

*Gil Cutter, the gnarled old trapper, lived in a shack at the mouth of the creek, not fifty yards around the bend from the deepwater hole where Old Lucy, the long-time resident gator, lurked. Gil had raised his nephew Tommy Dow since he was eleven or twelve, and later Old Gil would say that maybe when Tommy was thirteen, Gil should have tied him up in a sack and tossed it in the swamp . . .*

# SWAMP BEAST

***by JOHN C. BOLAND***

Pirates and spacemen swarmed over Bailey's Rest in late summer. The pirate craze erupted when "Treasure Island" played at the Bijou for three weeks in July. Spacemen took over after old Gil Cutter spied a flying saucer at Heron Cove the first evening in August.

Daniel Kennard was only peripherally aware of these enchantments, despite their wholehearted pursuit by his nine-year-old son, Davy. Obligations to his summer students of Chaucer and Milton kept him commuting up to the university until mid-August, and he left it to his wife to keep a rein on reality. But on the second morning of his freedom he got the ancient, 1.5-horsepower outboard started and launched his flat-bottomed pram downstream.

Gil Cutter's shack stood on posts at the mouth of the creek, not 50 yards around the bend from the deepwater hole where Old Lucy, the long-time resident gator, lurked. Dan thought that Cutter and the reptile made suitable neighbors, each being about as ugly and bad-tempered as the other. Just before reaching the cove, he spotted Old Lucy, sunning on the bank, surrounded by a new brood. The

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tiny, yellow-and-black-striped infants couldn't have hatched more than a couple of days before, but they already had the voracious appetites that would enable them to grow a foot a year—those that weren't themselves gobbled up by their uncles and cousins.

Gil Cutter was already at work, whacking heads off fish on the back porch that jutted over the sheltered water. He wrapped Dan's line around a piling and offered a hand up. "How's Delia? Got that pretty gal expecting again?"

"Not yet."

Gil had been asking the same question ever since Davy was born. The old man's grin lingered a moment, then flickered off. "Tommy's come back."

Dan jerked a glance at the cabin door.

Gil said, "He's gone down to Matilda's for some drinking."

"On your money?"

"Nope, his own. Can't figure why my nephew prefers bottled turpentine to good local-made stuff. Wait, I'll get you a cup."

"It's pretty early—"

As the old trapper banged the screen door, Dan wondered what had lured Tommy Dow back home. Nothing as simple as fondness for his uncle, he felt sure. The question evoked uneasy memories. Danny Kennard had been fatherless and 13, securely under Gil Cutter's wing, the fall that Tommy's mother had her heart attack. That meant that Tommy had been an oversized eleven or twelve when he moved in. His resentment of the smaller neighbor boy whom Gil had taught to fish and trap had been immediate, his reprisals brutal and frequent until Gil doggedly began repaying him in kind.

Four years later Tommy Dow, who already had the height and bearing of a man, moved in with the Folger widow. That hadn't lasted long—only until Susie Folger found out the boy wasn't much for bending his back in the garden or the house. But Tommy had never gone back to Gil's shack for more than a few weeks at a time. When he was 20, he served six months up at Sedalia for stealing. A few years later, a husky six-three, pale blond hair already thinning, he knocked Cutter on the head one Saturday night and made off with the old man's poaching money. Gil treated it as a joke on himself. "Never should have let the rascal get behind me." Dan thought it was better that Gil hadn't had a chance to fight.

He now stared after his old friend, into the gloomy shack. Not getting an invitation inside had come as a relief. He'd never been

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sure whether Gil was serious in claiming that living in squalor was living close to nature and God. But he suspected that the old man was a devout agnostic who, just as a personal quirk, didn't mind mold in the sink and spiders under the bed.

After a few moments Cutter came out, squinting at the early sun haze over the water. A gnarled hand tossed Dan a tin cup. "Pour yourself." He handed over a brown jug.

Dan took a sip and shuddered. He decided it would be safer to sit down. "What's all this nonsense about flying saucers?"

The leathery old face went ingenuous. "Nonsense? Actually, I was just having some fun. That boy of yours and his friends went for it whole hog. Got little Davy scurrying around town looking for places with burned-off grass or mutated plants. Mind you, I didn't claim I saw much—just a light in the sky that might have been a flying saucer. Course, *you* might have figured it was a shooting star, probably 'cause you got such good instruction in 'em before you got to know everything."

Dan sighed and sipped the hooch. He felt the old distance creep between them. Cutter could joke about "learned Professor Kennard," but the joking touched something real, told them both that there had been a change over the years.

Well, for one thing, Dan thought, I'm no longer a timid kid needing guidance.

Or what guidance he might need, at the disquieting age of 30, couldn't come from Gil's coarse and woodsy wisdom.

Dan rubbed his head where the sun had made it warm. "You're getting to be a grouchy old dog."

"Guess I am."

"How's Tommy?"

The old man's lips shrank into a wrinkled line. "You know why I'm grouchy. Catherine's boy, you'd think some good would have come of him. Look at you: ain't even got common woods sense, but you live respectable. So why's Tommy a varmint?"

Dan looked at his cup, embarrassed by Cutter's pain. From the front of the shack, where a gravel path led down to the county road and Matilda's place, he heard the bang of a door.

A moment later Tommy pushed open the screen door. "Hello, Danny-boy!" He dropped quickly to his belly, planted his elbow on the furred planks, and waved a heavily muscled forearm. "Want to renew the old grudge match, Danny? The arm's been giving me trouble, and you might beat me." The sunburned face's smile was

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natural and charming, instinctive camouflage for whatever went on behind the blue eyes.

Tommy had invented the grudge match when he was 14, after learning that arm wrestling was a way he could consistently whip Daniel Kennard without having to answer to his Uncle Gil's willow lash. Dan didn't think he'd taken up the challenge in ten years, but Tommy always offered the reminder of the old defeats, then watched with catlike pleasure, almost as if he knew the processes by which Dan was intellectualizing away the renewed humiliation.

"No?" Tommy raised his almost invisible brows, then sat up. " 'Nother time, Professor."

In retaliation, Dan said, "What are you doing for a living these days?"—then realized, too late, that it was the sort of thing Tommy was waiting for, evidence that touching the old sore could still bring a yelp.

"Gettin' by. I'm always gettin' by, Danny. Ol' Tommy don't need much. Just a safe hole where he can rack in, a little friendly woman company, something to wet his whistle. Nothing to load this boy down."

"Last I heard you were living down at the Forks."

"Yeah, you heard that, did you?" Now—so unexpectedly that it made Dan's head swim—the jovial veil had thinned and the animal was watching him from the light eyes. The jolt was as sharp as the time he had stumbled through a screen of tall grass to a chest-high mud bank and stared, from a distance of no more than a foot, into the implacably hating eyes of a water moccasin. With a maximum display of contempt, the snake had turned and slithered into the grass, not bothering to strike the exposed white throat of the man who stood frozen.

The animal in Tommy's eyes settled back, no longer disturbed. His glance drifted meaninglessly past the fish knife that gleamed in Gil's brown hand. As if transmitted by telepathy, Dan saw an image of himself, floating headless and scaled and untroubling in the slough so that Tommy Dow wouldn't have to worry about him.

He glanced at Dow, and the casualness with which the other man accepted eye contact told him the threat hadn't been entirely in his imagination.

Gil spoke up. "And how was things down at the Forks?"

"Real fine," Tommy said. His broad face cracked into a grin. "But there's no place like the place a boy was raised. That's 'cause it's

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got his kin and friends. Uncle Gil, Danny-boy, and that handsome lady of his."

Riding home, Dan felt as weakened as if they had come to battle—and as vanquished. He recognized an atavistic shame that can be aroused in the male by a stronger male. He got a tight hold on it and forced it down. Still, when he saw Delia out digging in the garden, her body strong and brown and challenging, he felt oddly inadequate. The professor's lot, he told himself, was to be cuckolded. It happened that way in all the novels of academia.

He caught himself wondering how his Radcliffe-educated wife would respond to Tommy Dow's attentions. Why, of course, she would be revolted, as she would by any insensitive animal. Yet, perhaps, excited by the power? It wasn't a subject he could bring up. When he kissed her, offering Gil's gift of newspaper-wrapped fish, she asked, "And how's the community of man's wisest dropout?"

"Cranky."

"Sober-cranky?"

"Not entirely."

"I thought I smelled something. Don't you be cranky, darling. It's allowable only for people with Gil Cutter's excuses. I heard in town that someone had seen Tommy. I can't understand why Gil would let him move in."

"Hard to say." He didn't want her to talk against Cutter.

"Did you say be quiet?"

"Something like that." He added a smile.

"Still, any nephew that would rob his own kin—"

"That was years ago. Tommy's straightened out some."

She stared at him. "You know, you being blind to Gil Cutter's faults is one thing. But Tommy is another sort of animal."

"Let's drop it. You want these fish for supper?"

Suspicious signs had been spotted, according to Davy Kennard, out back of the E&K Grill—three circular patches of scorched grass, and in a muddy spot, tracks that weren't bear or man.

"More of Gil's mischief?" Delia complained.

In doing so, she interrupted Davy's accounting of the several proofs that aliens were among them. He looked at his mother with a mixture of compassion and contempt. "If they're from Venus, they're probably amphibian. Then they'd take to the slough. Course, those tracks—"

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"You think Earl or Kelsey could be feeding this hysteria, darling?"

Earl and Kelsey were the E&K's two owner-proprietors.

Davy looked at his plate. "You'll see."

Came Monday, the alien invasion had been localized around the E&K and the old-timers were standing each other to drinks and recounting long-ago brushes with the Jersey Devil and Bigfoot, who might, after all, have been marooned extraterrestrial visitors.

Dan dropped by the tavern long enough to buy a six-pack, then spent the morning in his pram fishing. He took along his .38 and worked off some hostility by nailing a water moccasin at 20 yards.

He brought the boat home silently, letting the current do the work. As it bumped against a piling, he heard a grunt. Its inflection rose at the end, as if it carried a question or complaint. He stepped onto the pier and saw Gil's outboard-equipped old lapstrake rowboat tied to the other side, nestled among the cattails where it was invisible from any angle except from directly above. He listened intently, his head craned toward the house. He heard a faint mewling.

Bending, he scooped the .38 out of the bow, crept lightly across the rickety boards, and sprinted through the grass. The screen door stood ajar a half foot. Kicking it aside, he plunged into the kitchen, grabbed Tommy Dow's blue-shirted shoulder, and slammed the pistol into the side of Tommy's head. Delia broke away as Tommy buckled to his knees. She had a bruise under one eye and the top of her dress was torn. She looked like a doe at bay. Even with her attacker dazed, she backed away from him, making nearly inaudible gulping sounds.

As Dow turned his head, Dan saw four oozing red tracks on his left cheek.

He pointed the pistol between the dulled eyes, then pointed it more at the floor. The anger had shrunk away, leaving only sickness and fear. You could catch the beast once, bring it down through luck, but what was to stop it from coming back? Even as he looked at his wife and said softly, "If you're okay, call the Sheriff," he thought that there would be bail. What was to prevent the beast from coming back?

Dan's finger tightened on the trigger, and he had to back away, out of the wrecked kitchen into the sunlit doorway, to resist the fearful desire to put one of those snake-killing slugs through that freckled scalp.

At that instant Delia came back, holding her dress together, and Dan shifted his gaze.

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Tommy hit him in the middle, head first, with a driving tackle that carried them through the screen door and somersaulting off the back step. Dan groped feebly to hang onto the muscled shoulder, but Dow reared from his grip, looked right and left for the gun, then slammed a foot into Dan's side, skipped over him, and strode indifferently down the yard to Gil Cutter's boat.

Dan stared at the sky as he heard the motor catch then settle into a chortling purr as the outboard turned into the creek. Delia appeared in the doorway, holding the twelve bore from the top shelf of the closet. She looked at him, then raised her eyes to follow Tommy Dow's escape, as if by doing so quickly she could hide the disappointment that had flicked across her eyes. Dan got up slowly, barely aware of the blinding flash in his side, and retrieved the .38 from where it had lain under him.

"You're all right?" His voice sounded hollow, a mile away.

She nodded.

"Where's Davy?"

"Over at the Blevinses."

"Thank God for that."

She leaned her large body against the doorway, fingered the bruise under her eye.

"I'm going to take a shower."

Dan could only nod. She was loyal, he thought; she would do her best not to let him know she loved him less for being unable to protect her.

He heard the shower start. Normally that would have awakened a comfortable, mild desire. Instead he felt a trickle of shame, which he had not succeeded in burying by the time the Sheriff's car arrived.

They filed a complaint, and the deputy said he would drive down to Gil Cutter's.

"I'll ride along," Dan said.

"Funny thing," the deputy said as he drove, "we were coming for Dow anyway. Truck-stop waitress down at the Forks disappeared about ten days ago, same time as he left. She slopped coffee, and he liked to fight, so no one figured it was a loss if they'd gone off together. Now it looks like something else."

"Like what?"

"She worked in town about a year, maybe had a little money saved. Somebody cut her throat and stashed her in the swamp. Game warden found her yesterday . . ."

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Gil Cutter hobbled down from his front porch when their car appeared. He took the news grimly. "Is Delia gonna be all right?"

Dan nodded.

"Tommy went down to Matilda's this morning. Guess he must have called someone in the Forks who let on the girl's body had been found. When he came back, he asked nice as you please if he could borrow my fishboat and skedaddled."

The deputy asked, "Does he have any money?"

Gil lowered his eyes. "Not this time—not except what he might have in his pocket."

"We'll get him," the deputy said confidently. He climbed back into the car.

Dan hung back. "How about coming down to stay with us for a while?"

"Don't worry about me, Professor. If Tommy shows his face, I still got my Army pistol. Hope you tell Delia how sorry I am."

The way he said it made Dan wince. "I don't blame you for Tommy—neither does she."

Gil shook his head. "He was my responsibility. If when he was thirteen I'd tied him up in a sack and tossed it in the water, there'd be no talk now that he'd slit some young girl's throat—or hurt your gal." His face turned angry-red. "I thought about it once or twice."

That afternoon a breeze came up the creek from the cove. The deputy's parting words lingered in Dan's mind. "Might be better if we don't take that boy alive. The forensic work up at the Forks ain't so hot, and you can't hang a man just because he left town at the wrong time." He looked at Dan. "Course, he might do a year or two for attacking your wife."

Or he might not.

Either way, what would stop him from coming back?

From the pier, which he had built by driving pilings with Gil's help, the sky was hard-blue and empty. Glancing up the sun-parched yard, Dan felt none of his usual comfort in ownership. It was as if the land and the house had been staked out by a large male cat, announcing its intention to return.

His wife came out the back door and walked down through the grass. "Instead of worrying about Gil, why don't you go fetch him? Tie him up and haul him down here if you have to. I'll keep Davy indoors and the shotgun handy."

He hadn't been worrying about Gil, and he didn't want to admit

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that her idea came as a relief, an excuse. He retrieved the .38 and shoved the pram off.

A mile before the cove the creek forked, an arm of it bending deeper into the swamp, where it wound for 20 cypress-snarled miles before emptying into Heron Bay. If Dow was on the run, he could stay free for a while by going back there. Until they sent in dogs. Or until he got hungry. But if he hoped to get away for good, Gil's trapping money would shorten the bad odds.

Each inlet drew Dan's attention, but if Dow had lain in ambush earlier, expecting pursuit, he had given up the wait. Just before the cove, his boat strayed too near the shore. Old Lucy, the gator, roared a throaty warning. He swung quickly back to midstream.

He knew, when he got to Cutter's, that he and the deputy had come too early or too late. Probably too late. If Gil had been warned before Tommy's arrival, Dan was sure the old man would never have let his nephew get the drop on him. So he and the deputy had come too late, and Gil had gone out front and shooed them away rather than let Tommy shoot friends down from inside the shack. Then he had gone back inside, and Tommy had come up with ways of getting Gil to tell him where the trapping money was hidden.

And by then, an hour or so ago, Gil probably hadn't cared when Dow cut his throat like a deer's and hung him by one foot from the back of the pier as bait for the turtles.

Dan went into the filthy shack, made sure it was empty, scanned the surrounding rim of trees. Then he walked back onto the ancient planking and hauled the body up into the late afternoon light. He went back inside, pulled a blanket from the bed, brought it out, and draped it over the body. "You were right," he muttered. "You should have tied him up in a sack and drowned him."

He was kneeling over the body when he heard the cough and low whir of an outboard motor. As he stood up, Gil's boat churned around a clump of cypress ten yards downstream and plowed up the creek at full speed. He had time to understand why the figure was lying prone in the stern, one hand on the tiller, the other extended over the edge; he flung himself down as a slug from Gil's old .45 ripped the soft planking.

Rolling back, out of the line of fire, Dan tugged at the .38 in his back pocket, finally ripping the pocket to get it free. He thumbed back the hammer and raised his head an inch, expecting to see the boat turning toward the dock as Tommy closed in.

Instead, the light craft purred toward the mouth of the creek.

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Tommy fired another shot, which missed the pier but made Dan duck anyway.

He had blithely assumed that once on the run any predator would go to ground or dash for distant places. He had underestimated Dow again. With the sturdy little engine pushing him, Dow could follow the creek all the way up to the Forks in twelve hours.

No, Dan thought, even Tommy couldn't believe his luck would carry him through the net of lawmen Dan would alert—

He had a chance only for a last reprisal raid against the man he had resented all his life. And Dan understood that Tommy had been lying in wait not to kill him—but to slip past him, for another chance at Delia.

He was on his feet and stumbling forward and nearly fell into the pram when another shot forced him to hug the dock once again. He raised his head, sighting down on the rocking boat, and fired hopelessly, three shots, then swung himself down into the stern of his skiff, knowing that the tiny motor was his last undoing.

Swinging around, he saw Dow steer into the creek mouth, bouncing on the ripple. By the time he reached the confluence, the boat was 50 yards upstream, wrapped in a glare of reflected sunlight. Dan crouched low though he was fairly confident that neither of the two moving figures had much hope of shooting the other. After a minute he appeared, against all logic, to be gaining on the other craft.

Then he saw that although the motor still whirred at full throttle, Dow's craft was wallowing. Tommy was paying less attention to his pursuer than to furiously hand-bailing water. Too late, he steered the boat toward the black hump of shore.

When the boat lost headway, then settled into the creek with a hiss of steam from the motor, Tommy stood up in the chest-deep water and turned toward his pursuer. He cradled his left arm against his chest but held both hands open and empty as Dan drew abreast.

"That was some shooting, Professor Danny-boy. Winged me, then that tumbling bullet punched a hole in the bottom you could put two fingers through." He grinned, squinting against the glare. He wiped a wet hand across his forehead, darkening the eyebrows and plastering down the cornsilk hair. "Son of a gun I wish I'd bashed your head in back at the house."

Dan turned the throttle so low that it barely held his position against the current. He let the craft drift closer to Tommy, who nodded and held out his good arm. "Now you think you can get this

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boy aboard and back to the law. Just like a good citizen." A blue eye winked.

Dan tossed a line to Tommy, and when Dow's hand reached out to catch it, Dan pointed the revolver at the bridge of the nose and thumbed back the hammer.

The grin on the face widened, then found voice in a shrill scream. Tommy thrashed the air and plunged backward. Blood and water foamed as Old Lucy's massive tail slapped the surface. Then the gator dove, pulling the meat into the deep, duckweed-cloaked eddy near the bank. A dozen young ones slipped into the water and vanished.

Dan lowered the hammer and set the pistol between his feet. Then he turned the boat so that he could tend to Gil Cutter.

## DETECTIVERSE

### *CURRENT PENALTY*

*by MARK GRENIER*

The reason a thug named LaFarge is
No longer a killer at large is,
    Though he would have preferred
    To be free as a bird,
It's the chair — for the state preferred charges.

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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

## CRIME BEAT

**by R. E. PORTER**

*MYSTERY OMNIBUSES*: With the price of paperback mysteries rapidly climbing toward $2.50, hardcover omnibus volumes that sell for $10.95 are becoming more of a bargain each day. That's the price of the thick volumes British publishers Octopus Books and William Heinemann have been jointly producing for the past few years. The series now numbers close to fifty books in England, each containing from four to ten unabridged novels by a single Twentieth Century author. Twelve of the books are now available in this country, and though mainstream writers like Conrad, Maugham, and Steinbeck predominate, the mystery and suspense novel are well represented by volumes devoted to the work of Daphne du Maurier, Graham Greene, John le Carré, Alistair MacLean, and Mary Stewart. Series titles published in England but not yet in this country feature the novels of Eric Ambler, Raymond Chandler, Ian Fleming, Erle Stanley Gardner, Robert Ludlum, Ed McBain, Georges Simenon, and Dennis Wheatley.

Speaking of omnibuses, John D. MacDonald scored a unique coup this past July, when an omnibus of three Travis McGee novels was the main selection of Doubleday's Mystery Guild, in the same month that an omnibus of MacDonald's early science-fiction and fantasy novels was the main selection of the Science Fiction Book Club.

*MYSTERY FANS*: We're pleased to report that *Mysterious Times*, a quality "fanzine" that suspended publication two years ago, has returned. Publisher is William A. Karpowicz, Jr. (P.O. Box 1479, Grand Rapids, MI 49501), and the first of the new issues is due in August.

*MYSTERY DUO*: Bowling Green University Popular Press (Bowling Green, Ohio 43403) recently published two books of special interest to mystery readers. *Watteau's Shepherds* by LeRoy Lad Panek deals in depth with the detective novel in Britain from 1914 to 1940. And Peter Wolfe's *Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett* is a skillful analysis of Hammett's novels and short stories.

*MYSTERY TEACHER*: William Brittain, creator of teacher-detective Mr. Leonard Strang, is himself a teacher at a Long Island high school. Recently he combined his careers



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of teacher and mystery writer to produce a study guide to a new collection of Sherlock Holmes stories being published for school use by Silver Burdett Company.

*LOST MYSTERIES*: Last spring a columnist for *The New York Times Book Review* started calling attention to distinguished books which are out of print and difficult to obtain in any edition. This seems like a good idea for mysteries as well, and I'll start off by listing a trio of books which are not only rare in this country but have never even been published in America.

Cameron McCabe's *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor* (London, 1937) has been called by Julian Symons "the detective story to end detective stories," yet American readers have never seen it. Even more inexplicably, the first novel by Eric Ambler and the second novel by Julian Symons himself remain unpublished in this country. Ambler's is *The Dark Frontier* (1936), while the Symons is *A Man Called Jones* (1947), his second mystery about Inspector Bland. Let's hope some American publisher will remedy these oversights soon.

*COMING ATTRACTIONS*: Due in September from Random House is *Loon Lake*, E. L. Doctorow's first novel since his 1975 bestseller, *Ragtime*. It's said to combine aspects of the detective story with those of the American picaresque epic.

Another September attraction is sure to be *The Agatha Christie Who's Who*, compiled by Randall Toye and published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston. This biographical dictionary lists all the characters from the Christie stories, and includes the first complete bibliography of her writings.

Last year's Edgar winner, Ken Follett, will be trying for his third bestselling suspense novel in three years when William Morrow publishes *The Key to Rebecca* in November. Already chosen as a main selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club, the novel deals with a little-known incident in World War II in which a German spy employed a book code using Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

And it's good to know that university presses are at last discovering the treasures in Cornell Woolrich's short fiction. Southern Illinois University Press has plans to publish a collection of Woolrich's fantasy stories, edited by Martin Greenberg and Charles Waugh, with an introductory essay by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and an afterword by Barry N. Malzberg.

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"Q"



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# BLOODY VISIONS

## by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

*"The Shadow!" he exclaimed. "I have heard of him. I have listened to his voice over the radio. They say that his identity is unknown, even in the broadcasting studio. Some have said he is a supercriminal. Others have claimed that he is a great detective. Which is true?"* The bewildered speaker is from an early issue of *The Shadow* magazine, which debuted in 1931, and the answer has really not been clear-cut since. The wise know that—despite the celebrated radio series which has added so many catch phrases to our language, and one of the longest-running mystery shows on the air—the Shadow is *not* really Lamont Cranston, but is hidden behind several identities, and does not cloud men's minds to become invisible. (He just *seems* that way, his black cloak and hat blending into the darkness of the night.) Happily, there may soon be opportunity to enlarge our Shadow-lore: the giant Universal Studios-MCA, the largest supplier of programming for television, has just optioned the venerable but still sinewy Shadow for a feature film and possible TV series.

Alas, Walter Gibson, who as Maxwell Grant created the crimefighter and wrote most of his twice-a-month novel-sized adventures for over a decade—a prodigious literary achievement!—and who is now, hale in his eighties, still writing (magic books and an autobiography), shares directly in none of this, although he may serve as a consultant. (The rights to the character had been acquired by the same merchandising company which had successfully marketed Buck Rogers for TV and Charlie Chan for the new feature now shooting, *Charlie Chan and the Dragon Queen*, starring Peter Ustinov and Angie Dickinson.) The Shadow's publishers, Street & Smith ignoring profit, were aloof about crossing the character into the visual media, and at first practically *gave* the Shadow to the movies just for the publicity value: "They felt they were in the magazine business and nothing else," Gibson recalled wryly for EQMN.

The first feature to be carved from the legend was Grand National's 1937 *The Shadow Strikes*, with silent-screen idol Rod La Rocque as Lamont Granston, a criminologist donning the cloak—though not often nor enthusiastically—to track down his lawyer father's murderer. Only his manservant Henry knew of his secret identity. The second film was even more listless. *International Crime* (from the same studio in 1938) featured La Rocque as a radio crime reporter called "The Shadow," who—anonymous behind a microphone—doesn't bother with a cloak disguise at all. His targets are pre-war spies and fifth columnists; helping him is a scatterbrained secretary Phoebe (not Margo) Lane.

In 1940 a fifteen-chapter Columbia serial gave the Shadow full justice: Victor Jory as Lamont and Veda Ann Borg as a game Margo batt



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a criminal mastermind called the Black Tiger determined to destroy and conquer the city. The Tiger can make himself invisible electronically; in his other guise as a prominent citizen, he has infiltrated the exclusive Cobolt Club (a frequent setting of the pulp adventures) and has begun murdering its members. He blows up factories and railroad terminals. Lamont himself is seen in a third identity, the Chinese Lin Chang. Played swiftly against a background of night streets, *The Shadow* serial was among the best ever made.

Kane Richmond portrayed a pleasing but less gritty Lamont Cranston in three Monogram programs released in 1946. *The Shadow Returns* has a mystery-mansion setting, is quite eerie at times, and has an interesting solution to its murders: why victims topple from a balcony with no one nearby. In *Behind the Mask* someone else is dressing up as the Shadow, and getting away with murder; Lamont interrupts plans for his wedding to Margo (Barbara Reed) to stop the impostor. *The Missing Lady* is a stolen statuette. Twelve years later the Shadow goes to New Orleans to come to grips with an exiled dictator in *Bourbon Street Shadows* (Republic, 1958), the first film in which the crimefighter—played by Richard Derr—has the power of invisibility, a skill learned in the Orient which the radio series developed rather than the pulps. In more than two decades there have for the Shadow been no further screen adventures.

Certainly the close to 300 stories which Gibson penned will give the new series a wealth of material—even the parade of pulp covers, lurid and lovely, the Shadow with his craggy visage and black outline fighting evil, giving visual inspiration. (Some of the shadowy delights of this rich melodrama, along with reprints of the illustrations, can be found in Will Murray's *The Duende History of the Shadow Magazine*, published by Odyssey at $7.95, an in-depth companion to last year's *Shadow Scrapbook*.) Gibson recollects that one such cover—for *Hands in the Dark*, in May of 1932—was devised to foil distributors who were selling supposedly "returned" issues with covers missing. The entire plot revolved around a code—stick lines in a row like Aztec hieroglyphics. The code was constantly referred to in the story, but seen only on the cover—which therefore you needed to have. To boot, at the climax we learn the code is no code at all, but when overlaid upon a map of the city (the Shadow worked mainly in New York) the lines correspond to the streets pinpointing the headquarters of the villain. What a vision indeed!

With such a high degree of inventiveness, *The Shadow* and his creator should have no trouble mastering a new television series.

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# INTERVIEW: THOMAS WALSH

*EQMM:* You've published about 200 short stories. "Born Gambler," in this issue, is your 43rd in *EQMM.* In his introduction to your first *EQMM* story ("Getaway Money," 11/48) Ellery Queen, referring to your experience as a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, said, "Yes, scratch a writer and you find a newspaperman." Did your newspaper work lead you to the writing of fiction?

*WALSH:* I had already published a few magazine stories when I took the job as reporter on the *Sun.* I wanted an assured income at that time, as my wife was very ill, and I also wanted to see if newspaper work, writing to a deadline, would help me speed up my work. My fiction always came out slow as molasses. But one day I had to call up a woman whose husband had just been killed—got crushed between a street car and a truck, poor devil—and the wife hadn't yet heard a thing about it. He had left home hale and hearty about twenty minutes before. The poor girl began to scream hysterically on the phone when I finally made myself clear to her, and I decided then and there that newspaper work was not my apple. Too tender-hearted, despite having started out as a hard-boiled Black Mask writer. In fact, I could never help feeling profoundly sorry for the poor girls who had to dance with Fred Astaire, which goes to show you.

*EQMM:* Your first novel, *Nightmare in Manhattan*, won an Edgar in 1950. Have you found the novel or the short story the more satisfying or worthwhile?

*WALSH:* For 15 years I did nothing but short stories. I enjoyed writing them, and from 1948 to 1954 I must have done 35 or 40 for the old *Saturday Evening Post.* Then they suggested I try a serial for them and over the next 15 years I wrote just a handful of short stories and 11 thrillers. Because I'm so stupid and write with such agonizing slowness, it always was a tremendous effort for me to start another book. Two hundred blank pages scare the hell out of me. I can face 18 or 20 of them, but 200—woe.

*EQMM:* Many writers fail to instill the heart in their stories that you do without the taint of sentimentality.

*WALSH:* If I do create good and sympathetic characters, I think it's because of the aforesaid slowness of pace with which I write, so that I never start a yarn before I feel close as a brother to the people involved. I count no man frailer than myself, as I think Thomas à Kempis wrote, and I suppose this has always given me a head start in the right direction. Then too, the finest biblical quotation I've ever read, "Treat thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," has always stuck in my head since I first read it years and years ago.

"Q"



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# THE JURY BOX

**by JON L. BREEN**

Two of the classical detective novel's most distinguished practitioners—one British, one American, both women—have produced new novels. The two writers have several similarities. Both are as interested in the mysteries of character and personality as in more mechanical puzzles. Both are given to literary references and keen social observations. The younger of the two debuted in 1962 and hit her best stride in the '70s. The older writer published her first novel (one of the genre's finest) in 1938 and did her best work in the '40s. Neither is notably prolific, though the older writer has in recent years increased her production to a book a year. Both are well known for their series detectives, but in their new novels one presents her first non-series book, while the other returns to her recurring sleuth for his first book-length case in twelve years.

**** P. D. James: *Innocent Blood*, Scribners, $10.95. Although there is no whodunit angle and Adam Dalgliesh does not appear, James has not abandoned the mystery field in her new novel, in which pursuit, suspense, and an unconventional detective interest are as important as the rich style and character drawing. Concerning an adopted daughter who seeks information about her true parentage and discovers her mother was a murderess, it is a story remarkably lacking in villains. The only drawback to this fine novel is an ending that may be a touch too neat. The book ranks with (but not, I think, ahead of) the best of the Dalgliesh cases.

*** Helen McCloy: *Burn This*, Dodd, Mead, $7.95. The first novel about psychiatrist Basil Willing since *Mr. Splitfoot* (1968) may not be in a class with such McCloy classics as *Cue for Murder*, *Dance of Death*, or *Through a Glass Darkly*, but it is far superior to most of the author's recent books. Most of the characters are writers, and one of the book's central mysteries is the identity of a particularly poisonous Boston book reviewer known as Nemesis. The novel is rich in the arcane information and intelligent talk that make even lesser McCloy so readable and interesting. Welcome back, Dr. Willing, and please stick around a while!

*** Margaret Truman: *Murder in the White House*, Arbor House, $9.95. Despite its setting, the author's first mystery is not so much the usual world-hanging-by-a-thread doomsday thriller as an old-fashioned closed-circle whodunit with the presidential circle as victims, sleuths, suspects, and killer. In all, an agreeable job with a nicely handled melodramatic finish.

*** Ed McBain: *Ghosts*, Viking, $9.95. Though not the best 87th Precinct novel, as Stephen King suggests on the back jacket, this is a sound specimen and marks the first introduction of an occult element into the series. One of McBain's hallmarks is the use of *great* dialogue to pad out the story to whatever



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length is necessary—as a fan, I don't mind this, but I can imagine others finding it somewhat irritating.

*** Loren D. Estleman: *Motor City Blue*, Houghton Mifflin, $9.95. One of the more facile Conan Doyle pastichers turns to the world of Raymond Chandler with more impressive results. Detroit private eye Amos Walker may strain occasionally for his similes and metaphors, and the case he solves proves mind-bogglingly complicated, but generally smooth telling, a fresh locale, some excellent dialogue, and a western-writer's flair for action make this a strong addition to the hard-boiled school.

*** Margot Arnold: *The Cape Cod Caper*, Playboy Press, $1.95. The second novel about the detecting team of Penelope Spring and Tobias Glendower is a vast improvement over their first. The two middle-aged academics continue to be likeable characters, and the plotting and pacing of the book are much surer-handed. The first corpse is found in a cranberry bog, enough to make the reader nostalgic for Asey Mayo.

** Phillips Lore: *Murder Behind Closed Doors*, Playboy Press, $1.95. Though Leo Roi's second case is also somewhat better than his first (*Who Killed the Pie Man?*), the wealthy midwestern lawyer-detective still has a long way to go. The solutions to the book's locked-room mysteries are presented in throw-away fashion; the killer's motivation is hard to swallow; and the novel exudes self-congratulatory liberalism in its treatment of the gay characters. A smooth writing style and epigraphs from *Winnie the Pooh* can't quite salvage things.

The Detection Club's original anthology, *Verdict of 13*, originally published in the U.S. in 1979, is now in paperback (Ballantine, $2.95). Introduced by Julian Symons, the book presents tales by some of the biggest names among active British writers, though not all are in top form here. Another welcome reprint is Cyril Hare's final novel, *Untimely Death* (Harper-Perennial, $1.95), known in Britain as *He Should Have Died Hereafter* (1958). An expert plotter, Hare was equally adept at character and atmosphere, as this account of lawyer-sleuth Francis Pettigrew's nostalgic return to his boyhood haunts will show.

Readers of Robert Barnard's witty detective novels will not be surprised that his new book, *A Talent To Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie* (Dodd, Mead, $10.00), is easily the best to date about the creator of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. It is the first to offer some genuine in-depth critical analysis of Christie's work, doing for her what Francis M. Nevins, Jr.'s *Royal Bloodline* did for Ellery Queen.

A very handsome set of hardcover reprints from Gregg Press allows contemporary readers to rediscover S. S. Van Dine's unjustly maligned sleuth Philo Vance through his first six cases, originally published between 1926 and 1933. Beginning with *The Benson Murder Case*, followed by the *Canary, Greene, Bishop, Scarab,* and *Kennel* murder cases, the volumes are priced at $10.95 each and feature stills from the film versions and tantalizing new introductions by Chris Steinbrunner.

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**a *NEW* Black Widowers story by**

**ISAAC ASIMOV**

*There are not many places left in the country—public places, that is—where women do not have the right of admission. But the monthly banquet of the Black Widowers, in a public restaurant, has always been "stag," and male chauvinism in such matters dies hard. Nevertheless, it is still true that the exception proves the rule. So meet Mrs. Barbara Lindemann, this month's guest of the Black Widowers, and hear her problem—one resulting from an unusual experience on the sidewalks of New York . . .*

# THE GOOD SAMARITAN

*by ISAAC ASIMOV*

The Black Widowers had learned by hard experience that when Mario Gonzalo took his turn as host of the monthly banquet, they had to expect the unusual. They had reached the point where they steeled themselves, quite automatically, for disaster. When his guest arrived there was a lightening of spirit if it turned out he had the usual quota of heads and could speak at least broken English.

When the last of the Black Widowers arrived, therefore, and when Henry's efficient setting of the table was nearly complete, Geoffrey Avalon, standing, as always, straight and tall, sounded almost light-hearted as he said, "I see that your guest has not arrived yet, Mario."

Gonzalo, whose crimson velvet jacket and lightly striped blue pants reduced everything else in the room to monochrome said, "Well—"

Avalon said, "What's more, a quick count of the settings placed at the table by our inestimable Henry shows that six people and no more are to be seated. And since all six of us are here, I can only conclude that you have not brought a guest."

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"Thank Anacreon," said Emmanuel Rubin, raising his drink, "or whatever spirit it is that presides over convivial banquets of kindred souls."

Thomas Trumbull scowled and brushed back his crisply waved white hair with one hand. "What are you doing, Mario? Saving money?"

"Well—" said Gonzalo again, staring at his own drink with a totally spurious concentration.

Roger Halsted said, "I don't know that this is so good. I like the grilling sessions."

"It won't hurt us," said Avalon, in his deepest voice, "to have a quiet conversation once in a while. If we can't amuse each other without a guest, then the Black Widowers are not what once they were and we should prepare, sorrowing, for oblivion. Shall we offer Mario a vote of thanks for his unwonted discretion?"

"Well—" said Gonzalo a third time.

James Drake interposed, stubbing out a cigarette and clearing his throat. "It seems to me, gentlemen, that Mario is trying to say something and is amazingly bashful about it. If he has something he hesitates to say, I fear we are not going to like it. May I suggest we all keep quiet and let him talk."

"Well—" said Gonzalo, and stopped. This time, though, there was a prolonged silence.

"Well—" said Gonzalo again, "I *do* have a guest," and once more he stopped.

Rubin said, "Then where the hell is he?"

"Downstairs in the main dining room—ordering dinner—at my expense, of course."

Gonzalo received five blank stares. Then Trumbull said, "May I ask what dunderheaded reason you can possibly advance for that?"

"Aside," said Rubin, "from being a congenital dunderhead?"

Gonzalo put his drink down, took a deep breath, and said firmly, "Because I thought she would be more comfortable down there."

Rubin managed to get out an "And why—" before the significance of the pronoun became plain. He seized the lapels of Gonzalo's jacket, "Did you say '*she*'?"

Gonzalo caught at the other's wrists, "Hands off, Manny. If you want to talk, use your lips, not your hands. Yes, I said 'she'."

Henry, his sixtyish, unlined face showing a little concern, raised his voice a diplomatic notch and said, "Gentlemen! Dinner is served!"

Rubin, having released Gonzalo, waved imperiously at Henry and

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said, "Sorry, Henry, there may be no banquet. —Mario, you damned jackass, *no woman can attend these meetings.*"

There was, in fact, a general uproar. While no one quite achieved the anger and decibels of Rubin, Gonzalo found himself at bay with the five others around him in a semicircle. Their individual comments were lost in the general explosion of anger.

Gonzalo, waving his arms madly, leaped onto a chair and shouted, "Let me speak!" over and over until out of exhaustion, it seemed, the opposition died off into a low growl.

Gonzalo said, "She is not our guest at the banquet. She's just a woman with a problem, an old woman, and it won't do us any harm if we see her *after* dinner."

There was no immediate response and Gonzalo said, "She needn't sit at the table. She can sit in the doorway."

Rubin said, "Mario, if she comes in here, I go, and if I go, damn it, I may not ever come back."

Gonzalo said, "Are you saying you'll break up the Black Widowers rather than listen to an old woman in trouble?"

Rubin said, "I'm saying rules are *rules*!"

Halsted, looking deeply troubled, said, "Manny, maybe we ought to do this. The rules weren't delivered to us from Mount Sinai."

"You, too?" said Rubin savagely. "Look, it doesn't matter what any of you say. In a matter as fundamental as this, one blackball is enough, and I cast it. Either she goes or I go and, by God, you'll never see me again. In view of that, is there anyone who wants to waste his breath?"

Henry, who still stood at the head of the table, waiting with markedly less than his usual imperturbability for the company to be seated, said, "May I have a word, Mr. Rubin?"

Rubin said, "Sorry, Henry, no one sits down till this is settled."

Gonzalo said, "Stay out, Henry. I'll fight my own battles."

It was at this point that Henry departed from his role as the epitome of all Olympian waiters and advanced on the group. His voice was firm as he said, "Mr. Rubin, I wish to take responsibility for this. Several days ago Mr. Gonzalo phoned me to ask if I would be so kind as to listen to a woman he knew who had the kind of problem he thought I might be helpful with. I asked him if it were something close to his heart. He said that the woman was a relative of someone who was very likely to give him a commission for an important piece of work—"

"Money!" sneered Rubin.

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"Professional opportunity," snapped Gonzalo. "If you can understand that. And sympathy for a fellow human being, if you can understand *that*."

Henry held up his hand.

"*Please,* gentlemen! I told Mr. Gonzalo I could not help him but urged him, if he had not already arranged a guest, to bring the woman. I suggested that there might be no objection if she did not actually attend the banquet itself."

Rubin said, "And why couldn't you help her otherwise?"

Henry said, "Gentlemen, I lay no claims to superior insight. I do not compare myself, as Mr. Gonzalo occasionally does on my behalf, to Sherlock Holmes. It is only after you gentlemen have discussed a problem and eliminated what is extraneous that I seem to see what remains. Therefore—"

Drake said, "Well, look, Manny, I'm the oldest member here, and the original reason for the prohibition. We might partially waive it just this once."

"No," said Rubin flatly.

Henry said, "Mr. Rubin, it is often stated at these banquets that I am a member of the Black Widowers. If so, I wish to take the responsibility. I urged Mr. Gonzalo to do this and I spoke to the woman concerned and assured her that she would be welcomed to our deliberations after dinner. It was an impulsive act based on my estimate of the characters of the gentlemen of the club.

"If the woman is now sent away, Mr. Rubin, you understand that my position here will be an impossible one and I will be forced to resign as waiter at these banquets. I would have no choice."

Almost imperceptibly the atmosphere had changed while Henry spoke and now it was Rubin who was standing at bay. He stared at the semicircle that now surrounded him and said, rather gratingly, "I appreciate your services to the club, Henry, and I do not wish to place you in a dishonorable position. Therefore, on the stipulation that this is not to set a precedent and reminding you that you must not do this again, I will withdraw my blackball."

The banquet was the least comfortable in the history of the Black Widowers. Conversation was desultory and dull and Rubin maintained a stony silence throughout.

There was no need to clatter the water glass during the serving of the coffee, since there was no babble of conversation to override. Gonzalo simply said, "I'll go down and see if she's ready. Her name,

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by the way, is Mrs. Barbara Lindemann."

Rubin looked up and said, "Make sure she's had her coffee, or tea, or whatever, downstairs. She can't have anything up here."

Avalon looked disapproving, "The dictates of courtesy, my dear Manny—"

"She'll have all she wants downstairs at Mario's expense. Up here we'll listen to her. What more can she want?"

Gonzalo brought her up and led her to an armchair that Henry had obtained from the restaurant office and that he had placed well away from the table.

She was a rather thin woman, with blunt good-natured features, well dressed and with her white hair carefully set. She carried a black purse that looked new and she clutched it tightly. She glanced timidly at the faces of the Black Widowers and said, "Good evening."

There was a low chorused rumble in return and she said, "I apologize for coming here with my ridiculous story. Mr. Gonzalo explained that my appearance here is out of the ordinary and I have thought, over my dinner, that I should not disturb you. I will go if you like, and thank you for the dinner and for letting me come up here."

She made as though to rise and Avalon, looking remarkably shamefaced, said, "Madame, you are entirely welcome here and we would like very much to hear what you have to say. We cannot promise that we will be able to help you, but we can try. I'm sure that we all feel the same way about this. Don't you agree, Manny?"

Rubin shot a dark look at Avalon through his thick-lensed glasses. His sparse beard bristled and his chin lifted but he said in a remarkably mild tone, "Entirely, ma'am."

There was a short pause, and then Gonzalo said, "It's our custom, Mrs. Lindemann, to question our guests and under the circumstances, I wonder if you would mind having Henry handle that. He is our waiter, but he is a member of our group."

Henry stood motionless for a moment, then said, "I fear, Mr. Gonzalo, that—"

Gonzalo said, "You have yourself claimed the privilege of membership earlier this evening, Henry. Privilege carries with it responsibility. Put down the brandy bottle, Henry, and sit down. Anyone who wants brandy can take his own. Here, Henry, take my seat." Gonzalo rose resolutely and walked to the sideboard.

Henry sat down and said mildly to Mrs. Lindemann, "Madame, would you be willing to pretend you are on the witness stand?"

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The woman looked about and her look of uneasiness dissolved into a little laugh. "I never have been and I'm not sure I know how to behave on one. I hope you won't mind if I'm nervous."

"We won't, but you needn't be. This will be very informal and we are anxious only to help you. The members of the club have a tendency to speak loudly and excitably at times, but if they do, that is merely their way and means nothing. —First, please tell us your name."

She said, with an anxious formality, "My name is Barbara Lindemann. Mrs. Barbara Lindemann."

"And do you have any particular line of work?"

"No, sir, I am retired. I am sixty-seven years old as you can probably tell by looking at me—and a widow. I was once a schoolteacher at a junior high school."

Halsted stirred and said, "That's my profession, Mrs. Lindemann. What subject did you teach?"

"Mostly I taught American history."

Henry said, "Now from what Mr. Gonzalo has told me you suffered an unpleasant experience here in New York and—"

"No, pardon me," interposed Mrs. Lindemann, "it was, on the whole, a very pleasant experience. If that weren't so, I would be only too glad to forget all about it."

"Yes, of course," said Henry, "but I am under the impression that you *have* forgotten some key points and would like to remember them."

"Yes," she said earnestly. "I am so ashamed at not remembering. It must make me appear senile, but it was a very *unusual* and *frightening* thing in a way—at least parts of it were—and I suppose that's my excuse."

Henry said, "I think it would be best, then, if you tell us what happened to you in as much detail as you can, and if it will not bother you, some of us may ask questions as you go along."

"It won't bother me, I assure you," said Mrs. Lindemann. "I'll welcome it as a sign of interest. I arrived in New York City nine days ago—from the west coast. I was going to visit my niece, among other things, but I didn't want to stay with her. That would have been uncomfortable for her and confining for me, so I took a hotel room.

"I got to the hotel at about six P.M. on Wednesday and after a small dinner, which was very pleasant, although the prices were simply awful, I phoned my niece and arranged to see her the next

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day when her husband would be at work and the children at school. That would give us some time to ourselves and then in the evening we could have a family outing.

"Of course, I didn't intend to hang about their necks the entire two weeks I was to be in New York. I fully intended to do things on my own. In fact, that first evening after dinner, I had nothing particular to do and I certainly didn't want to sit in my room and watch television. So I thought—well, all Manhattan is just outside, Barbara, and you've read about it all your life and seen it in the movies and now's your chance to see it in real life.

"I thought I'd just step out and wander about on my own and look at the elaborate buildings and the bright lights and the people hurrying past. I just wanted to get a *feel* of the city, before I started taking organized tours. I've done that in other cities in these recent years when I've been traveling and I've always so enjoyed it."

Trumbull said, "You weren't afraid of getting lost, I suppose."

"Oh, *no,*" said Mrs. Lindemann. "I have an excellent sense of direction and even if I were caught up in my sightseeing and didn't notice where I had gone, I had a map of Manhattan and the streets are all in a rectangular grid and numbered—not like Boston, London, or Paris, and I was never lost in those cities. Besides, I could always get in a taxi and give the driver the name of my hotel. Besides, I was sure anyone would give me directions if I asked."

Rubin emerged from his trough of despond to deliver himself of a ringing, "In Manhattan? Hah!"

"Why, certainly," said Mrs. Lindemann, with mild reproof. "I've always heard that Manhattanites are unfriendly, but I have not found it so. I have been the recipient of many kindnesses—not the least of which is the manner in which you gentlemen have welcomed me even though I am quite a stranger to you."

Rubin found it necessary to stare intently at his fingernails.

Mrs. Lindemann said, "In any case, I did go off on my little excursion and stayed out much longer than I had planned. Everything was so colorful and busy and the weather was so mild and pleasant. Eventually, I realized I was terribly tired and I had reached a rather quiet street and was ready to go back. I looked in one of the outer pockets of my purse for my map—"

Halsted interrupted. "I take it, Mrs. Lindemann, you were alone on this excursion."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Lindemann. "I always travel alone since my husband died. To have a companion means a perpetual state of

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compromise as to when to arise, what to eat, where to go. No, no, I want to be my own woman."

"I didn't mean quite that, Mrs. Lindemann," said Halsted. "I mean to ask whether you were alone on this particular outing in a strange city—at night—with a purse."

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid so."

Halsted said, "Had no one told you that the streets of New York aren't always safe at night—particularly, excuse me, for older women with purses who look, as you do, gentle and harmless?"

"Oh, dear, of *course* I've been told that. I've been told that of every city I've visited. My own town has districts that aren't safe. I've always felt, though, that all life is a gamble, that a no-risk situation is an impossible dream, and I wasn't going to deprive myself of pleasant experiences because of fear. And I've gone about in all sorts of places without harm."

Trumbull said, "Until that first evening in Manhattan, I take it."

Mrs. Lindemann's lips tightened and she said, "Until then. It was an experience I remember only in flashes, so to speak. I suppose that because I was so tired, and then so frightened, and the surroundings were so new to me, that much of what happened somehow didn't register properly. Little things seem to have vanished forever. That's the problem." She bit her lips and looked as though she were battling to hold back the tears.

Henry said softly, "Could you tell us what you remember?"

"Well," she said, clearing her throat and clutching at her purse, "as I said, the street was a quiet one. There were cars moving past, but no pedestrians, and I wasn't sure where I was. I was reaching for the map and looking about for a street sign when a young man seemed to appear from nowhere and said, 'Got a dollar, lady?' He couldn't have been more than fifteen years old—just a boy.

"Well, I would have been perfectly willing to let him have a dollar if I thought he needed it, but really, he seemed perfectly fit and reasonably prosperous and I didn't think it would be advisable to display my wallet, so I said, 'I'm afraid I don't, young man.'

"Of course, he didn't believe me. He came closer and said, 'Sure you do, lady. Here, let me help you look,' and he reached for my purse. Well, I wasn't going to let him have it, of course—"

Trumbull said firmly, "No 'of course' about it, Mrs. Lindemann. If it ever happens again, you surrender your purse at once. You can't save it in any case. Hoodlums think nothing of using force and there's nothing in a purse that can be worth your life."

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Mrs. Lindemann sighed. "I suppose you're right, but at the time I just wasn't thinking clearly. I held on to my purse as a reflex action, I suppose, and that's when I start failing to remember. I recall engaging in a tug of war and I seem to recall other young men approaching. I don't know how many but I seemed surrounded.

"Then I heard a shout and some very bad language and the loud noise of feet. There was nothing more for a while except that my purse was gone. Then there was an anxious voice, low and polite, saying, 'Are you hurt, madam?'

"I said, 'I don't think so, but my purse is gone.' I looked about vaguely. I think I was under the impression it had fallen to the street.

"There was an older young man holding my elbow respectfully. He might have been twenty-five. He said, 'They got that, ma'am. I'd better get you out of here before they come back for some more fun. They'll probably have knives and I don't.'

"He was hurrying me away. I didn't see him clearly in the dark but he was tall and wore a sweater. He said, 'I live close by, ma'am. It's either go to my place or we'll have a battle.' I *think* I was aware of other young men in the distance, but that may have been a delusion.

"I went with the new young man quite docilely. He seemed earnest and polite and I've gotten too old to feel that I am in danger of—uh—*personal* harm. Besides, I was so confused and lightheaded that I lacked any will to resist.

"The next thing I remember is being at his apartment door. I remember that it was apartment 4-F. I suppose that remains in my mind because it was such a familiar combination during World War II. Then I was inside his apartment and sitting in an upholstered armchair. It was a rather rundown apartment, I noticed, but I don't remember getting to it at all.

"The man who had rescued me had put a glass into my hand and I sipped from it. It was some kind of wine, I think. I did not particularly like the taste, but it warmed me and it seemed to make me less dizzy—rather than more dizzy, as one would suppose.

"The man appeared to be anxious about my possibly being hurt, but I reassured him. I said if he would just help me get a taxi I would get to my hotel.

"He said I had better rest a while. He offered to call the police to report the incident, but I was adamant against that. That's one of the things I remember *very* clearly. I knew the police were not likely

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to recover my purse and I did *not* want to become a newspaper item.

"I think I must have explained that I was from out of town because he lectured me, quite gently, on the dangers of walking on the streets of Manhattan. —I've heard so much on the subject in the last week. You should hear my niece go on and on about it.

"I remember other bits of the conversation. He wanted to know whether I'd lost much cash and I said, well, about thirty or forty dollars, but that I had traveler's checks which could, of course, be replaced. I think I had to spend some time reassuring him that I knew how to do that, and that I knew how to report my missing credit card. I had only had one in my purse.

"Finally I asked him his name so that I could speak to him properly and he laughed and said, 'Oh, first names will do for that.' He told me his and I told him mine. And I said, 'Isn't it astonishing how it all fits together, your name, and your address, and what you said back there.' I explained and he laughed and said he would never have thought of that. —So you see I knew his address.

"Then we went downstairs and it was quite late by then, at least by the clock, though, of course, it wasn't really very late by my insides. He made sure the streets were clear, then made me wait in the vestibule while he went out to hail the cab. He told me he had paid the driver to take me wherever I wanted to go and then before I could stop him he put a twenty-dollar bill in my hand because he said I mustn't be left with no money at all.

"I tried to object, but he said he loved New York, and since I had been so mistreated on my first evening there by New Yorkers, it had to be made up for by New Yorkers. So I accepted it—because I knew I would pay it back.

"The driver took me back to the hotel and he didn't try to collect any money. He even tried to give me change because he said the young man had given him a five-dollar bill, but I was pleased with his honesty and I wouldn't take the change.

"So you see although the incident began very painfully, there was the extreme kindness of the Good Samaritan young man and of the taxi driver. It was as though an act of unkindness was introduced into my life in order that I might experience other acts of kindness that would more than redress the balance. And I *still* experience them—yours, I mean.

"Of course, it was quite obvious that the young man was not well off and I strongly suspected that the twenty-five dollars he had expended on me was far more than he could afford to throw away.

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Nor did he ask my last name or the name of my hotel. It was as though he knew I would pay it back without having to be reminded. Naturally, I would.

"You see, I'm quite well-to-do really, and it's not just a matter of paying it back. The Bible says that if you cast your bread upon the waters it will be returned tenfold, so I think it's only fair that if he spent twenty-five dollars, he ought to get two hundred and fifty back, and I can afford it.

"I returned to my room and slept so soundly after all that; it was quite refreshing. The next morning, I arranged my affairs with respect to the credit card and the traveler's checks and then I called my niece and spent the day with her.

"I told her what had happened but just the bare essentials. After all, I had to explain why I had no bag and why I was temporarily short of cash. She went on and *on* about it. I bought a new purse—this one—and it wasn't till the end of the day when I was in bed again that I realized that I had not made it my business to repay the young man *first thing*. Being with family had just preoccupied me. And then the real tragedy struck me."

Mrs. Lindemann stopped and tried to keep her face from crumpling, but she failed. She began to weep quietly and to reach desperately into her bag for a handkerchief.

Henry said softly, "Would you care to rest, Mrs. Lindemann?"

Rubin said, just as softly, "Would you like a cup of tea, Mrs. Lindemann, or some brandy?" Then he glared about as though daring anyone to say a word.

Mrs. Lindemann said, "No, I'm all right. I apologize for behaving so, but I found I had forgotten. I don't remember the young man's address, *not at all,* though I must have known it that night because I talked about it. I don't remember his first name! I stayed awake all night trying to remember, and that just made it worse. I went out the next day to try to retrace my steps, but everything looked so different by day—and by night, I was afraid to try.

"What must the young man think of me? He's never heard from me. I took his money and just vanished with it. I am worse than those terrible young hoodlums who snatched my purse. I had never been kind to *them*. They owed *me* no gratitude."

Gonzalo said, "It's not your fault that you can't remember. You had a rough time."

"Yes, but *he* doesn't know I can't remember. He thinks I'm an ungrateful thief. Finally I told my nephew about my trouble and he

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was just thinking of employing Mr. Gonzalo for something and he felt that Mr. Gonzalo might have the kind of worldly wisdom that might help. Mr. Gonzalo said he would try, and in the end—well, here I am.

"But now that I've heard myself tell the story I realize how hopeless it all sounds."

Trumbull sighed.

"Mrs. Lindemann, please don't be offended at what I am about to ask, but we must eliminate some factors. Are you sure it all really happened?"

Mrs. Lindemann looked surprised, "Well, of *course* it really happened. My purse was *gone*!"

"No," said Henry, "what Mr. Trumbull means, I think, is that after the mugging you somehow got back to the hotel and then had a sleep that may have been filled with nightmares so that what you remember now is partly fact and partly dream—which would account for the imperfect memory."

"No," said Mrs. Lindemann firmly, "I remember what I do remember perfectly. It was not a dream."

"In that case," said Trumbull, shrugging, "we have very little to go on."

Rubin said, "Never mind, Tom. We're not giving up. If we choose the right name for your rescuer, Mrs. Lindemann, would you recognize it, even though you can't remember it now?"

"I hope so," said Mrs. Lindemann, "but I don't know. I've tried looking in a phone directory to see different first names, but none seemed familiar. I don't think it could have been a very common name."

Rubin said, "Then it couldn't have been Sam?"

"Oh, I'm certain that's not it."

"Why Sam, Manny?" asked Gonzalo.

"Well, the fellow was a Good Samaritan. Mrs. Lindemann called him that herself. Sam for Samaritan. His number and street may have represented the chapter and verse in the Bible where the tale of the Good Samaritan begins. You said his name and address fitted each other and that's the only clue we have."

"Wait," put in Avalon eagerly, "the first name might have been the much less common one of Luke. That's the gospel in which the parable is to be found."

"I'm afraid," said Mrs. Lindemann, "that doesn't sound right,

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either. Besides, I'm not *that* well acquainted with the Bible. I couldn't identify the chapter and verse of the parable."

Halsted said, "Let's not get off on impossible tangents. Mrs. Lindemann taught American history in school, so it's very likely that what struck her concerned American history. For instance, suppose the address were 1812 Madison Avenue and the young man's name was James. —James Madison was President during the War of 1812."

"Or 1492 Columbus Avenue," said Gonzalo, "and the young man was named Christopher."

"Or 1775 Lexington Avenue and the name Paul for Paul Revere," said Trumbull.

"Or 1623 Amsterdam Avenue and the name Peter," said Avalon, "for Peter Minuit, or 1609 Hudson Street and the name Henry. In fact, there are many such named streets in lower Manhattan. We can never pick an appropriate one unless Mrs. Lindemann remembers."

Mrs. Lindemann clasped her hands tightly together. "Oh, dear, oh, *dear,* nothing sounds familiar."

Rubin said, "Of course not, if we're going to guess at random. Mrs. Lindemann, I assume you are at a midtown hotel."

"I'm at the New York Hilton. Is that midtown?"

"Yes. Sixth Avenue and 53rd Street. The chances are you could not have walked more than a mile, probably less, before you grew tired. Therefore, let's stick to midtown. Hudson Street is much too far south and places like 1492 Columbus or 1812 Madison are much too far north. It would have to be midtown, probably west side—and I can't think of anything."

Drake said, through a haze of cigarette smoke, "You're forgetting one item. Mrs. Lindemann said it wasn't just the name and address that fit but what the young man said back there—that is, at the site of the rescue. What did he say back there?"

"It's all so hazy," said Mrs. Lindemann.

"You said he called out roughly at the muggers. Can you repeat what he said?"

Mrs. Lindemann colored. "I could repeat *some* of what he said, but I don't think I want to. The young man apologized for it afterward. He said that unless he used bad language the hoodlums would not have been impressed and would not have scattered. Besides, I know I couldn't have referred to *that* at all."

Drake said thoughtfully, "That bites the dust then. Have you

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thought of advertising? You know, 'Will the young man who aided a woman in distress—' and so on."

"I've thought of it," said Mrs. Lindemann, "but that would be *so* dreadful. He might not see it and so many impostors might try to make a claim. —Really, this is so dreadful."

Avalon, looking distressed, turned to Henry and said, "Well, Henry, does anything occur to you?"

Henry said, "I'm not certain. —Mrs. Lindemann, you said that by the time you took the taxi it was late by the clock but not by your insides. Does that mean you arrived from the west coast by plane so that your perception of time was three hours earlier?"

"Yes, I did," said Mrs. Lindemann.

"Perhaps from Portland, or not too far from there?" asked Henry.

"Why, yes, from just outside Portland. Had I mentioned that?"

"No, you hadn't," interposed Trumbull. "How did you know, Henry?"

"Because it occurred to me, sir," said Henry, "that the young man's name was Eugene, which is the name of a town only about a hundred miles south of Portland."

Mrs. Lindemann rose, eyes staring. "My goodness! The name *was* Eugene! But that's marvelous. How could you possibly tell?"

Henry said, "Mr. Rubin pointed out the address had to be in midtown Manhattan on the west side. Dr. Drake pointed out your reference to what the young man had said at the scene of the rescue, and I recalled that one thing you reported him to have said was that you had better go to his place or there'd be a battle.

"Mr. Halsted pointed out that the address ought to have some significance in American history and so I thought it might be 54 West 40th Street, since there is the well-known election slogan of '54-40 or fight,' the election of 1844, I believe. It would be particularly meaningful to Mrs. Lindemann if she were from the northwest since it pertained to our dispute with Great Britain over the Oregon Territory. When she said she was indeed from near Portland, Oregon, I guessed that the rescuer's name might be Eugene."

Mrs. Lindemann sat down, "To my dying day I will never forget this. That *is* the address. How could I have forgotten it when you worked it out so neatly from what little I did remember."

And then she grew excited. She said, "But it's not too late. I must go there *at once*. I must pay him or shove an envelope under his door or something."

Rubin said, "Will you recognize the house if you see it?"

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"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Lindemann. "I'm sure of that. And it's apartment 4-F. I remembered that. If I knew his last name, I would call, but, no, I want to *see* him and explain."

Rubin said mildly, "You certainly can't go yourself, Mrs. Lindemann. Not into that neighborhood at this time of night after what you've been through. Some of us will have to go with you. At the very least, I will."

Mrs. Lindemann said, "I very much dislike inconveniencing you, Mr. Rubin."

"Under the circumstances, Mrs. Lindemann," said Rubin, "I consider it my duty."

Henry said, "If I know the Black Widowers, I believe we will all accompany you, Mrs. Lindemann."

## DETECTIVERSE

### *SICK TRANSIT*

*by ELEANOR SULLIVAN*

There was a young person named Gloria,
Whose male friend was deprecatory 'er.
He drowned off her dory,
The dredging was gory,
But she never felt hunkydorier.

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*Found in* POPULAR TALES OF THE WEST HIGHLANDS, *and there orally narrated by Donald Macintyre from Benbecula. This version is translated from the original Gaelic by Iain Crichton Smith . . .*

# THE INHERITANCE

***(original author unknown)***

There was once a rich farmer who had three sons and when he was on his deathbed he called them to him and said:

"My sons, I am going to leave you and let there be no quarreling when I am gone. In a certain drawer, in a dresser in the inner chamber, you will find a sum of gold. Divide it fairly and honestly among you, work the farm, and live together peaceably as you have done with me." And shortly after that the old man died.

The sons buried him, and when all was over they went to the drawer, but when they opened it the drawer was empty.

They stood for a while in silence till at last the youngest spoke and said, "Perhaps there was no money at all and our father was playing a trick on us."

The second son said, "I am sure there was money, wherever it may be now."

Then the eldest said, "Our father never told a lie. There *was* money and I can't understand what has happened to it."

Finally they decided, on the advice of the eldest, to see an old man who had been a friend of their father's. "He knew him well," said the eldest. "He was at school with him and there is no man alive who knew so much about his affairs."

So the three sons went to consult with the old man, and told him what had happened.

"Stay with me," said the old man, "and I will think over this matter. I cannot understand what has happened but, as you know, your father and I were great friends. I know that he never told a



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lie." And they stayed with him for ten days, and he was very hospitable to them.

At the end of the ten days he had them sit down beside him and told them the following story.

"Once upon a time there was a young lad who was very poor. He fell in love with the daughter of a rich neighbor, and she returned his love, but because he was so poor they could not marry. Nevertheless, they pledged themselves to each other, and the young man went away and stayed in his own house. After a time another suitor came along, and because he was rich, the girl's father made her promise to marry him, and after a time they were married.

"But when the bridegroom came to her, he found her weeping, and he said, 'What is wrong with you?'

"For a time the bride wouldn't answer, but at last she told him the whole story and how she was pledged to another man.

" 'Get dressed,' said the man, 'and follow me.'

"So she dressed herself in her wedding clothes, and he put her behind him on his horse, and they rode to the house of the other man. When they arrived there, the bridegroom knocked on the door and called out, 'Is there anyone at home?'

"When the other man came out the bridegroom left his bride with him, speaking not a word, and then returned home.

" 'What brought you here at this time of night in your bridal gown?' asked the man to whom she had been betrothed, after he had struck a light and recognized her.

" 'My husband brought me,' said the bride. 'I was married to him today and when I told him of the promise I had made to you, he brought me here and left me.'

" 'Stay here till I come back,' said the man. 'Are you not supposed to be married?' And he took his horse, rode to the priest, and in front of the priest he released the woman of her promise to him. He gave her a piece of paper on which he had written that she was free of her pledge to him, set her on a horse, and said, 'Now return to your husband.'

"So the bride rode away in the darkness in her wedding dress. She had not gone far, however, when she came to a thick wood where three robbers seized her.

" 'Aha,' said one, 'we have waited long here with no luck and now we have found ourselves a bride.'

" 'Let me go,' she pleaded. 'Let me go home to my husband. Here are ten pounds in gold. Let me go and resume my journey.'

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"So she begged and prayed for a long time till at last one of the robbers who was of a better nature than the others said, 'She is a bride, after all. I will take her home myself.'

" 'Take the money,' she said.

" 'I will not take a penny,' said the kindly robber. But the other two said, 'Give us the money,' and they took the ten pounds.

"The woman rode home and the robber left her at her husband's door, and she went in and showed her husband the paper of release which her former betrothed had given her, and the two of them were happy and well pleased with each other."

"Now," said the old man to the three brothers, "which of all these do you think acted the best?"

The eldest son after some thought said, "I think that the woman's husband acted best for he showed his generosity in sending her to the man to whom she was pledged in the beginning."

The second son disagreed. "I think," he said, "the man to whom she was pledged acted better than the husband, for he sent her back to him, according to his code of honor."

"I don't know myself," said the youngest, "who acted the *best*. But perhaps two of the robbers were the wisest, for at least they got the money."

The old man got to his feet and said, "It is you who have the gold. I have kept the three of you here for ten days. I have watched all three of you well. I know your father never told a lie and I was sure one of you stole the money."

And so the youngest confessed, and the gold was found and divided among the three as the father had originally intended.

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**a *NEW* short story**

**GEORGE BAXT**

*This is the first appearance in EQMM of George Baxt, creator of detective Pharaoh Love. You will find it a contemporary story about a concert pianist named Zoltan—sophisticated and subtle, wicked and witty . . .*

# CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

*by GEORGE BAXT*

I was kneeling on the floor with my head in the oven when the phone rang. Anyone with a stronger character than mine would have ignored the interruption and continued with this sorry business of self-destruction, especially as from the moment I had come to the decision to commit suicide, it had taken three days to select the method, muster the courage, and finally spur myself to this ultimate action. I did my best to prove to myself I was made of sterner stuff, as I had proved to myself (much to my delight and surprise) on at least three previous occasions.

So while the telephone continued nagging like some ubiquitous shrew, I inhaled deeply which brought on a coughing fit. I had heard of fits like these causing heart attacks or fatal hemorrhages which of course frightened the hell out of me, so I staggered to the sink for a glass of water.

Relief came almost instantly, but not from the telephone. It was still agonizing away, which was a clue to the probable identity of the dauntless party at the other end. My money was on Maud Magruder. Maud was one of that peculiar breed of rich (she said) middle-aged middle-Western widow who chose to settle in New York for the sole purpose, it seemed to me, of preying on unattached middle-aged men like myself.

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I made my automatic move of reaching for cigarettes and lighter when I realized with horror and a cold shudder in this gas-filled room that I might blow myself up. I turned off the five jets, flung open the window, and was attacked by a hurricane of freezing wind. I drew my cardigan tightly around me for fear of pneumonia and hurried to the living room.

"Hello?" I said weakly into the mouthpiece.

"Oh, darling! You *are* at home! Did I get you out of the bath?" It was Maud Magruder.

"No, Maud, I was just lying down."

"You're not ill or anything, are you?"

Her concern was as automatic and impersonal as the mechanism responsible for this connection.

"I'm not ill. I just don't feel very well."

"You sound perfectly awful. How long have you been back?"

"Three days," I said without thinking, chalking up another reason for suicide.

"Three *whole* days! And you didn't *call*?" I could see that look of indignation, the one she had mastered and perfected to fill one (especially me) with guilt. Medusa's look turned men into stone, Maud's turned me into jelly. ("Oh, darling you didn't go see that movie without *me*! You *know* I was dying to see that movie." "You wretch! You had an invitation to that opening and took someone *else*?" "Blackguard! You know I've been aching to meet the Galtons and you took Bernice *Grimshaw* to their party?")

I tempted the Fates and lied. "I called you the day I got back but you weren't at home."

"What day was this? Wednesday?"

"Yes."

"What time did you call?"

"Oh, for God's sake, Maud, I don't remember what time I called."

"I was home all day Wednesday."

I stretched out on the couch and longed for a cold towel to soothe my aching forehead. "I'm positive I called," I continued, lying brazenly, devil may care, unconcerned by the consequences, knowing full well that soon I'd be back in the kitchen with my head in the oven, this time with the phone off the hook, and breathing deeply of Chanel Number Death.

"There's no need to sound so testy."

I thought I had sounded bored. "Let's not have an argument, Maud, I'm just not in the mood for an argument."

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"Then you really must be ill. Is that why you cut the trip short?"

"More or less."

"Oh?" I could almost hear her cosying up to the phone. "Is Kurt there with you?"

"No."

"You didn't return *alone,* did you? Where did you leave *Kurt?"*

"Somewhere in Maine."

"Well, I'll be damned." Wishing won't make it so. "How'd you get *back?"*

"I walked."

"You *are* testy."

"I took a train."

"Why didn't you fly?"

"The weather was bad."

"I just knew you two would have a fight somewhere along the way. You *did* have a fight, didn't you?"

I was positive I heard her licking her lips. Maud thrived on other people's misfortunes. Tell Maud a mutual friend has a terminal disease and she'll insist on throwing a farewell party. Tell Maud old friends are divorcing and she'll announce plans for dinner at Lutece. A really splendid day for Maud is when *The Times*'s obituaries list a minimum of three of her contemporaries.

I must have reclined silent for close to 30 seconds staring at the ceiling. Maud of course interpreted the silence as a tacit corroboration of her deduction. "What did you fight about?"

"Everything."

"Oh, come now!"

"He got on my nerves."

"Well, of course he did," she gurgled. "You two are *so* alike."

*You've got to meet Kurt Ackerman. You'll adore him. He's so much like you.*

"You remember I didn't like him the moment you brought him around." Maud's voice was unpleasantly shrill. "Why does Bernice Grimshaw insist on thrusting so many unpleasant people on you?"

I couldn't resist it. "She introduced *you* to me." I heard her intake of breath followed by a brief pause and then an outburst of laughter. I can never win.

"Have you heard from Kurt?"

"No."

"It's just as well."

"I agree with you."

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"You must have had one lulu of a fight."

"I prefer not to discuss it."

"As you wish." Her voice was stiff. "I don't suppose by any chance you're free tonight?"

I wanted to say, "With any luck I'll soon be free forever." Instead I said, "I told you I wasn't feeling very well."

"It's just that I'm having a divine group in tonight for drinks and dinner. The Escuderos are bring Tony Gompers."

"So?"

"Tony *Gompers*. The *cellist*."

"Never heard of him."

"You must be going out of your mind! You took me to his recital last spring! How could you forget? You thought he was immensely gifted. You couldn't have forgotten. I remember saying at the time, coming from a brilliant musician like yourself that it was *indeed* a compliment. I mean *you* who said Artur Rubinstein was an arthritic hack." Another pause. "You've been pulling my leg."

Fat chance. "I'm sorry, Maud, I'm a bit vague today. Yes, I remember Tony Gompers, and he was good."

"Well, his wife's just left him for a flautist, and the Escuderos are helping him get over her. Oh, do come! He's so terribly lonesome and the Escuderos say he needs a friend to talk to."

"That's what Bernice said about Kurt when *he* left *his* wife."

"Oh, to hell with Kurt."

I silently agreed with her.

"Are you still there?"

"Where's to go?" I made no attempt to disguise my irritation.

"Darling, you're not in one of your . . . *moods* again, are you?"

My moods are celebrated, famous, perhaps more correctly, infamous. All great artists are prey to them. My moods are matched only by my monstrous temper. Perhaps you remember the headlines when I threw the piano stool at that deplorable conductor at my last public concert two years ago. I haven't performed in public since then. There was five months in that so-called rest home during which my lawyers effected an out-of-court settlement with that deplorable conductor's widow. Thanks to my so-called breakdown, I escaped prosecution. During the past year and a half of my self-imposed retirement I have attempted suicide on seven different occasions. The scars on my wrists are the results of four of those attempts. It was Maud who unkindly suggested I have my wrists fitted with zippers.

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I have nothing to live for. I have suffered three disastrous marriages. I have suffered the notorious court case when I sued my despicable parents for an accounting of my earnings as a child prodgy. (I had mastered every Chopin prelude by the age of four, and at five stunned the musical world by playing "The Minute Waltz" n 33 seconds. I filled the time remaining with "The Happy Farmer.") That trial left an ugly scar on my psyche. I received a very bad press when I refused to attend their joint funeral following the tragic car accident when I was driving them to the Catskills during an attempted reconciliation. I had been miraculously thrown from the car before it went over the cliff.

So I am very much alone in the world, without friends (Maud Magruder is hardly an incentive to go on living), unloved (my wives didn't marry me, they married my reputation) and my gift completely dissipated (the piano in my soundproofed studio hasn't been tuned in over 18 months.)

*"Zoltan!"*

"What? What?" I stared at the phone and realized it was Maud who had shouted my name. "Oh, Maud, I am sorry. I think I dozed off."

"Well, thank you very much for *that!*"

"Don't be angry. You just don't understand."

"Zoltan"—her voice was unusually soft and compassionate—"you're crying."

"No, I'm not," I said through a sniffle. "I think I'm catching a cold. The window's open in the kitchen and I'm lying in a draft."

"What shall we do with you?" I heard her tongue clucking. "Now, darling, pull yourself together and come to dinner."

"I really don't—"

"I will not take no for an answer. Tony Gompers is just what you need. He's gifted and witty and terribly attractive. Really, darling, he's so much like you."

"Flatterer." *So much like you.*

"I'll expect you at seven. Meantime, soak in a hot tub."

She hung up before I could remonstrate. I slammed my phone down violently. I stomped into the kitchen like a petulant child and tested the air with a huge sniff. All trace of gas had disappeared. I banged the window shut and erupted with a fit of sneezing. I stamped with a house-shaking stride to my soundproofed studio at the rear of the apartment. There was the piano in the middle of the room. Untouched. Unloved. Unwanted. Like myself.

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I stifled a sob as my eyes moved around the room. The six lithographs I kept delaying hanging on the walls were stacked in a corner, and on the floor were the box of nails and the hammer. The studio had been constructed by order of my lawyers during my stay in the rest home. The suggestion had been put to them by my psychiatrist. He had meant well. It would be there awaiting what he called "my new beginning." I didn't want a new beginning, which I dismissed along with the psychiatrist. I know my gift has also been my curse. Rejecting the piano was my way of exorcism.

Of course I attended Maud's dinner party. She's made of sterner stuff than I. (I assure you, I'll be back at that oven again, but not to prepare a meal.) Frankly, my curiosity overcame my morbid desire for death. I wanted to meet Tony Gompers. It fascinates and piques my interest when someone says, "You must meet so and so, he's so much like you." It's what drew me to Bernice Grimshaw's that night six weeks ago when she tempted me with Kurt Ackerman.

They say that one should profit by one's mistakes, but I'm a different sort of speculator. I'm not particularly religious, but I felt that Maud's phone call had in some way been preordained. I was not yet meant to die. It was destined for me to meet Tony Gompers.

If you're as myopic as I am, then you can honestly say Maud Magruder was a vision in her silver lamé pants suit, silver-rimmed harlequin glasses large enough to cover two faces instead of just hers, and glittering sandals to slightly minimize her height which was one inch short of six feet. Her face as always looked as though the cosmetics had been applied by a mortician, and very thoughtfully (some might say thoughtlessly) one of my recordings, a Brahms Piano Concerto, was permeating the room from four cleverly concealed speakers.

Her left cheek brushed my right cheek as though I might carry an infection. "How good of you to come, darling," she said in her party voice which was terribly British except for the flat a's which were a dead giveaway of her midwestern origin. I greeted Alphonse and Lolita Escudero (who were really Al and Lily Eichman), once celebrated professional ballroom dancers. They now owned dancing schools throughout the country and were immensely wealthy. Their hobby was collecting celebrities and sometimes trading their celebrities with a friend who had acquired a better celebrity. I had been traded at least four times. There were other guests, but they weren't important.

Maud took my sweaty hand and guided me to Tony Gompers who

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was leaning disconsolately against the grand piano. I expected him at any moment to break into "Stout Hearted Men." My ego swelled a bit when Maud introduced us and Tony brightened on hearing my name. Maud beamed like a good deed in a naughty world.

"I just *know* you two have a great deal to talk about," Maud insisted. She left us to greet some late arrivals.

"Maud was afraid you might not come," said Tony.

"Maud is never afraid," I replied somewhat archly. It was meant to sound good-natured but somehow I didn't quite manage to catch the effect.

"Well, now," he said.

"Yes, indeed," I replied.

He lowered his head conspiratorially and whispered, "I didn't want to come." So at least we had this in common. "How's the music coming?"

"I don't play any more."

"That's what Maud said, but I didn't believe her. She said you're so much like me, but I said that's not possible because I couldn't live without my cello."

"But I used to play the piano." We both laughed.

"Don't say 'used to.' You'll play the piano again."

"I really don't miss it. After all, I've had forty years of it. Remember, I was a child prodigy."

"So was I. Didn't you know?"

I didn't. I felt like asking him if he had ever sued his parents for an accounting of his earnings.

"Of course there was that awful mess with my parents," he said. "Much like yours, I suppose." I wondered if the change in my face was noticeable. I could feel the blood draining from it.

I managed to stammer out, "I didn't know about that."

"Well, why should you?" he asked with a pleasant smile. "I didn't really begin to make it on the concert stage until long after the law suit. I was strictly local stuff. The South." There was no trace of an accent. "I did pretty damned well for some fifteen years." His face darkened. "Then I met my wife. She took over from my parents. She was a successful manager." He mentioned her name and I recognized it.

"I didn't know you were married to her."

"Oh, yes, indeed I was. Twenty very long years. I suppose Maud's told you she's left me."

"For a flautist."

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"He's fifteen years younger than she is."

"Then his wind's still good." We broke up into laughter together over that one and he slapped me on the back in one of those hail-fellow-well-met gestures that had my back stinging for quite a while. We bantered back and forth amiably and jovially for at least half an hour until Maud announced dinner. The meal was a delicious and delightful affair and impeccably served. Maud held court at the head of the table, and every so often I would catch her glowing with motherly pride at Tony and myself, who kept up a steady stream of chatter and jokes, batting dialogue back and forth across the table like tennis champions.

I could tell that Maud considered the dinner party a huge success—the instant camaraderie between Tony and myself could only be exceeded for her by one of the Escuderos slumping over the dessert from a heart attack, which of course did not happen.

When I arrived home alone shortly after midnight, I was in amazingly good spirits. I even poured myself a brandy which is something I rarely do as brandy stimulates my adrenalin and causes a sleepless night. As a matter of fact, for the first time in over a year I played one of my own recordings and sat back in an easy chair, sipping brandy and listening to the ghost of my earlier genius. And then the phone rang.

"Good evening," I said somewhat mockingly into the mouthpiece, assuming the caller would be Maud to rehash the evening.

"Zoltan!" It was Bernice Grimshaw. "Maud told me you were back." Maud would. "What the hell happened?"

I swished the brandy lazily and said, "Kurt was a very disappointing traveling companion."

"Really!" You'd have thought I had slapped her in the face.

"He didn't like any of the accommodations. He complained about the food. He made snide remarks about the people we met, and he drove like a maniac."

"Well, you're the same way, for God's sake!" Bernice should know. We once took a trip together to Canada which was another mistake.

"I suppose so," I said somewhat airily. "Maybe that's why I couldn't stand it. So I defected."

"Poor old Kurt," whimpered Bernice, "having to drive all the way back from Maine by his lonesome."

"He enjoys talking to himself."

"Don't be so cruel," she snapped. "You're both cut from the same cloth. I should have known better than to bring you two together."

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"Don't blame yourself, dear," I said rather wearily, "I really didn't want to make that trip, if you recall."

"Well, I should have thought you two would have gotten along famously, larking your way across New England." Bernice was fishing for information. She was desperately in love with Kurt, who, of course, was not encouraging her. He was at the blue-jeaned tight-behind, teenage stage, an affliction that attacks many men in their forties. I had passed through that stage myself rather swiftly.

"There wasn't very much of that, Bernice."

"Hmmm. Well, have you any idea when he's getting back?"

"None whatsoever."

"You men. You're absolute babies, all of you." And Bernice wished she could diaper each and every one of us. "Are you free for lunch tomorrow?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not." I wasn't lying. I was having lunch with Tony Gompers.

"I gather you and Tony Gompers got along famously tonight." I groaned inwardly. I knew whatever she had gathered was from a crop seeded by Maud Magruder.

"I found him quite affable." In the middle of this statement I stifled a yawn. There was no stifling Bernice.

"I'm quite friendly with his wife." Somehow I had the feeling she was delivering a subtle warning rather than imparting an innocuous bit of information.

"Have you met her flute player?" I asked.

"I certainly have, and he's a vast improvement on Tony."

"How can you tell? They play different instruments."

"Don't be so snide. That's one of the reasons she decided to leave Tony."

"Because I'm so snide?"

"That's almost funny. Tony's snide, possessive, has a vicious temper, is given to childish tantrums, he's mean to her friends—"

"And on the seventh day he rested."

"Have I touched an exposed nerve? It must all sound so familiar. He's so much like you."

*You're mean. You're vicious. You're vindictive. How dare you drag us through the slime like that. You're driving much too fast. Are you trying to get us killed? Are you listening? Oh, you are impossible! You're just like your father! You're so much like him!*

"Bernice, it's terribly late, and I'm terribly tired."

"What's the music I hear?"

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"Liszt."

"Seems to me I have that recording." There was a dramatic pause followed by, "Why, it's *your* recording!"

"I only listen to the best."

Her voice dropped an octave. "Are you entertaining someone?"

"Myself." I took a sip of brandy. "We missed you at dinner tonight."

"Oh, go to hell."

"If you'll lead the way."

She slammed the phone down and almost gave me an earache.

As you may have gathered by now, Bernice and Maud are sisters under the skin. The catalogue of Tony's (and by inference, my) deficiencies could well apply to themselves. But I forgive them their sins as they do not forgive others. To be perfectly honest, I had planned to cancel the luncheon engagement with Tony Gompers. I know now that I don't really get along with men. I loathe sports, drinking in bars, and comparing notes on romantic triumphs.

I suppose you're thinking that Tony and I do have music in common, but I happen to find the cello a rather unpleasant instrument. It is frequently too guttural for my taste, which is lyrical. I should have studied the harp. It could have served two purposes—the second, of course, in my afterlife.

After turning off the stereo and finishing the brandy, I went to bed and suffered a series of incredible nightmares. Twice I awakened in a cold sweat and briefly considered retenanting the oven right then and there. My knees felt stiff and my nose was clogged, usually the symptoms of an oncoming cold. You wonder why I don't jump off a tall building? I have a fear of heights.

In the morning over toast and coffee and *The Times* crossword puzzle, Tony Gompers phoned. I tried to use my cold to beg off lunch, but he's as stubborn as I am about rejection. He was having none of my canceling and it finally ended up with me offering to cook lunch for the two of us. One way or another there's no avoiding that stove. Even the mean offering of eggs and sausage would not put Tony off. He insisted he wasn't much of a lunch eater and neither am I. Oh, what the hell, I decided, the hour or two will pass quickly.

Tony arrived promptly at one. To my very obvious chagrin he was toting his cello.

"I hope you don't mind," he said with a big smile as he followed me into the living room. "There's a piece I'd like you to hear and advise me on. I composed it myself." I could feel my spine freezing. "If you think it's any good, I'll play it at my next recital."

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"I'm not a very good judge of modern music," I said weakly.

"I'm sure you have a fine ear." I glanced at my ear as we passed a mirror and agreed with him. "It's a lyrical piece." I almost stumbled on the way to the kitchen. "They don't compose enough of them for the cello, don't you think?"

"I sure do."

The sausages were sizzling in a pan. "Oh," he said in an almost petulant voice, "you fry your sausages, you don't broil them." Little did he know how close he came to suffering a shower of sausages.

"I *always* fry sausages," I said with a rasp as I took the eggs from the refrigerator. There was something very *déja vû* about the scene. I consider myself a superior cook and have frequently been guilty of dismaying a host or hostess who hadn't prepared a dish in a manner I prefer.

Tony said, through a laugh, "I suppose you've said something similar in somebody else's kitchen at one time or another."

Is the clown a mind reader? Can there really be such a thing as thought transference? "Would you like a drink?"

"No, thanks, I never drink in the afternoon."

"Neither do I." I almost dropped an egg.

Somehow we managed to get through lunch. We had coffee in the living room and chatted—rather, Tony chatted and I listened. He monopolized the conversation much in the way I do when I find a fresh audience. It was most discomforting. I was very much on edge and not successfully camouflaging my feelings. I kept referring to my wristwatch and stifling yawns and picking non-existent lint from my trousers and growing bored with all the *uh-huhs* and *I sees* and *of courses* I was interjecting into his conversation by way of letting him know I was still alive.

Then there was still the cello concerto to endure. In the past, I wondered, was this the effect I had on people when I asked them to listen to a new piece I was attempting to master? Of course it was, and it frightened me. He's so much like me, and I could feel a trickle of perspiration down my side.

Just when I was about to suggest we go to my soundproofed studio, the phone rang.

I reached for it hungrily.

"Zoltan . . . oh, my God, Zoltan." It was Maud, the voice of doom.

"What's wrong, Maud? What is it?"

"Bernice just phoned, weeping bitterly. It was on the one o'clock news."

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I must have grown pale because Tony leaned forward anxiously and I averted my eyes from his. "What was?"

"Kurt's been found dead."

"What—how—what are you talking about?"

"What is it?" whispered Tony but I waved him to be quiet.

Maud told me Kurt's body had been found in the car in an isolated patch of woods near Portland, Maine. He had apparently gone off the road during a heavy fog and crashed into a tree. His skull had been crushed. "How awful," I said hoarsely.

"They say he's been dead for several days," continued Maud at her most tragic. "It must have happened shortly after you left him."

"How awful," I said again, because there was nothing else for me to say.

"But Zoltan," Maud continued, "the police suspect foul play."

"How can they?" It was a stupid thing to ask, but it was the first thing that came to my mind, and I am frequently guilty of speaking the first thing that comes to my mind.

"The monkey wrench in the trunk of the car had traces of blood on it."

"I didn't notice when we changed the tire. We—we'd had a blowout going at seventy. We were almost killed. That's what caused the argument. Oh, God. What a mess."

"Zoltan."

"What?"

"Bernice has phoned the police. She's told them you'd been traveling with Kurt."

I fought hard to keep from exploding. Tony's curiosity was now more than piqued. His hands were making semaphores trying to get me to give him some hint of what Maud was telling me. Obviously he had gathered Kurt was dead and under suspicious circumstances—at least, I assumed he had if he was so much like me. "She didn't have to do that. I would have gotten in touch with them."

"Oh, darling, of all times to put you under such stress."

"It's all right." I was amazed at how calmly I spoke. "It will be all right. Tony's here. We've just had lunch. He's brought his cello. He's going to play his new piece for me."

Tony was flexing his fingers.

"You're taking it beautifully," said Maud. I might have just refused the handkerchief before the firing squad. "Please call me later. I'm terribly concerned for you." I promised I would and hung up. I told Tony about Kurt. All he did was shrug.

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"He was a bore," said Tony.

He shouldn't have said that. He really shouldn't have said that. Of course Kurt was a bore. And Tony Gompers is a crashing bore. So much like me, of course. I stood up abruptly and Tony followed me to the studio carrying his cello. I flung open the door and stood aside for Tony. Then I slammed the door shut and the sound that reverberated through the studio was hollow and empty. Tony crossed to the piano and ran his fingers across the keys.

"My God, this is out of tune. How could you do it to this lovely instrument?"

The veins in my temples were throbbing and I pressed my fingers against them. Then I rubbed my sweaty palms together as Tony unpacked his cello. "Look, Tony," I stammered nervously, "I don't think I could be much of a judge of anything right now. Do you mind terribly?"

He looked up at me sharply and said in a tone of voice I found offensive, "It's a very short piece. This might be the only chance I'll get to play it for you."

I remember wondering then why he had said something like that. It sounded in a way sadistic and I know I have sounded that way on similar occasions. I spat an epithet and moved past him to where the lithographs were tacked. I couldn't resist a deliciously nasty impulse to hang one of them while Tony attempted to tune up the cello. I lifted the hammer, selected a nail, and began pounding it into the wall.

"Well, this is a fine time to do that!" Tony shouted angrily. "Are you afraid to hear this piece because it might be too good?"

There must have been a hideous look on my face when I rounded on him, clutching the hammer. He leaped from the seat so abruptly that he stumbled over the cello, lost his balance, and sprawled backward onto the floor.

I pounced on him like some wild animal, my left hand clutching his neck, my right hand holding the hammer poised to strike. Tony screamed and tried to scratch my face, just the way Kurt had tried.

"Don't!" he shouted hysterically, "Don't! Don't!"

I rained blow after blow on his skull. I could hear the bone crack as rivers of blood erupted.

"Why—why—" he gasped.

"You're so much like me!" I screamed in a voice I did not recognize. "You're so much like me . . . and I hate myself!"

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*"Now the footsteps were once more approaching the bed . . ."*

# THE TINKLING FOOTFALL

## by CHARLES NORMAN

"You're psychic, you're psychic—I can see that you are," Miss Hesketh exclaimed triumphantly. She was a tall, somewhat gaunt woman with the flushed cheeks of an enthusiast. She shook Douglas Hale's hand longer than he liked. Yet he was an uninvited guest, there only because his friend had said he was going to a séance and would Douglas like to come along.

The walk over the dunes had been pleasant, with the sea making an additional brightness in the air. Hale's friend was an artist—the dunes were his specialty. He did not seem to notice them very much; but perhaps he had lived there too long, painted them too many times. Douglas had the feeling he was preoccupied. It could have been his work. Maurice Perkins was not a successful painter, and he had more pictures than he knew what to do with. He also had a lot of money.

There were, of course, others present. In a moment all were out of the bright air of Provincetown and inside a cool, dark room in Miss Hesketh's cottage. There was just light enough to reveal a round table with a bare surface, and six or seven chairs. Everyone sat down and touched fingertips, palms down. Rembrandt might have been able to do something with those bent, expectant figures and that eerie gloom.

The table moved. It seemed to rise unexpectedly, and Douglas had all he could do to keep his fingertips joined to those of his neighbors. One part of the table would rise like a ship on the crest of a wave, then settle down. But what did it prove? Douglas thought. Either someone was surreptitiously tilting the table, for what reason he could not guess, or their combined electrical impulses did have an effect on the sleeping molecules of the seemingly solid wood. Either way, was it important?

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These thoughts were involuntary. But just then Miss Hesketh withdrew her hands abruptly. The aura was shattered, she announced; there would be nothing more that day. A chair scraped in the dark, and someone drew back the curtain. Light streamed in. Douglas shared the general relief.

Walking back over the dunes he expressed his skepticism. In reality, he was working off his nervousness. He had disliked being shut up in a darkened room with people he didn't know. He went further than he had intended, for he had no sooner spoken than it occurred to him that Maurice Perkins might have—probably did have—different views on the subject. But all he got from his friend was a quizzical look. Maurice was strangely silent. Douglas wondered if he was unwell.

The séance took place in the summer. In the fall Douglas went to Paris. For a day and a half he stayed in a hotel on the rue Bonaparte. Then he moved to a *pension* on the rue Chaplin, a cul-de-sac in the Montparnasse quarter. The *pension* was run by a widow in black, who was nevertheless a hearty eater, and it was tenanted by old ladies in black dresses of another era. Some of them had mustaches. All had bottles of wine which were kept in a special cabinet and placed on the dining-room table in the evening. After dinner, pencils were passed around and the bottles were marked to reveal at a glance next day if there had been any tampering or siphoning off. They also had their own napkin rings, all of them different, through which they passed their napkins after folding or rolling them up, each in her own way. These, too, went into a cabinet.

Douglas purchased a bottle for himself, and was given an ivory napkin ring with a brown tinge to it. He liked living and working in a *pension*; it lacked the bustle which even a small hotel would have.

The food was adequate, even though he suspected rabbit perhaps more often than was fair. The soups were superb, served from an immense tureen by the *patronne* herself.

So far as he could tell, there were only three other persons under 60 or 70—the chambermaid, a Breton girl with a pretty face and a good figure, if a somewhat sturdy one; another young woman whom he saw occasionally in the dining room, and her daughter, aged six or seven. The young mother worked. On rainy days the girl roller-skated in the hall.

The building itself was old and solidly made. The rooms were large, with furniture on the massive, even monumental side. Doug-

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las' room was on the ground floor, and it was there that he began his third book. For a while it went well. Then difficulties appeared. Suddenly every sound was exasperating to him, every noise an affront. He began to resent the roller skates whirring past his door. At night, when he was trying to think in bed, he would become aware of a scurry of footsteps in the room above. Before this he had not heard anything, not even the sound of his typewriter.

One day, when the chambermaid came into his room with a carafe of water and fresh towels, he got up courage to speak to her. "Mademoiselle," he said, "if you ever have a vacancy on another floor, perhaps you would be good enough to let me move into it."

And he gestured helplessly toward his typewriter.

At first the chambermaid had looked pleased because he had finally ventured to speak. But now she looked astonished.

"But, Monsieur!" she exclaimed. "There *is* a vacant room—up there." She was pointing to the ceiling.

He was about to remonstrate; but she had taken charge.

"I'll move your things up as soon as you are ready, Monsieur."

She was smiling again as she glanced around the room. She took the carafe and towels with her. "I must have been mistaken about the footsteps in the room above," Douglas thought. He busied himself with the packing.

When he returned from lunch his things had been moved. He found himself in a room not too dissimilar from the one he had vacated. There was the same wallpaper of monstrous maroon flowers, a massive bed, a wardrobe of solid oak that almost touched the ceiling, a table, chair, and washstand. The bed was alongside a wall opposite the single window. There was a light over the bed, and from it dangled a cord terminating in a pushbutton a foot or so above the pillow. Here and there in the dense foliage of the wallpaper he could see the ridges made by woodwork that had been papered over.

He set out his typewriter and paper, but decided not to work that day. It would be time enough to make a fresh start in the morning, after the *chocolat* and roll which the chambermaid would bring him. He hung up his clothes in the wardrobe, which was roomy enough for six men's suits—perhaps even the six men, he corrected himself, and smiled at his little joke.

After dinner he left the *pension* and spent the evening at a café on the Boulevard Montparnasse. Although it was not much after ten o'clock when he returned, the house was dark. He tiptoed up the stairs. Once in his new room he switched on the overhead light

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and began to undress. The bed seemed even bigger when he was in it. Propped on a huge pillow he began to think about the book, ironing out problems, certain he would fall asleep with solutions, and wake refreshed for breakfast and work.

He reached up to the light cord and pressed the button. At the same moment there was a footfall in the room. It came from the window sill, as though someone or something had leaped from the sill to the floor and started toward the bed. The footfall was accompanied by a muffled, tinkling sound.

Less than a second had passed; but the light was on again. His hand had fallen away from the pushbutton and returned to it as part of a single action. The footsteps were no longer heard. The window sill was bare. The room, like the rest of the house, was still.

But now it was a different room. Every piece of furniture stood forth from the shadow it made, and he could perceive the tiniest gleams made by the overhead light on typewriter, carafe, and glass, even those in the depths of the mirror over the washstand. The wardrobe loomed like a giant in armor. The walls, too, seemed to have come closer, and there was no longer a maroon blur of flowers on the wallpaper. His eyes followed every curve, every convolution, and fixed their gaze on every fiery center, unnoticed before. It was better not to look.

His head sank back into the cavity it had made in the pillow. The light stayed on.

So he had been right—he had heard footsteps overhead. But what were they? Whose were they? And what was that muffled, tinkling sound at the first footfall, which he had not heard before? Miss Hesketh could probably tell him, he thought bitterly. It startled him to remember her. He tried to put her out of his thoughts.

Propped on the pillow he considered his situation. He was alone in a room where an unseen presence shared or disputed possession with him. In the darkened house a dozen or so old women, two younger ones and a child drifted in sleep on their bolstered rafts. How could they help? His knock—his very appearance in the night—would merely spread the terror he felt. And what would he say? He began to compose a speech in his mind—who knows, he thought, he might have to use it.

"Madame, you must pardon me. I am in trouble. I went to bed, but no sooner had I put out the light when I heard footsteps in the room. Of course, I at once put on the light. No—there was no one there."

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"Well, Monsieur, there you are!"

Wait, he told himself. He had seen nothing. Perhaps he had heard nothing—at least, nothing inside the room. Might not the sounds have come from the street? After all, it was night, and everything was so still. He had only to switch off the light, and then he would know. He would not—he could not—be mistaken a second time. Put out the light!

His hand went up slowly to the dangling cord and closed itself around the wooden switch. His thumb was on the button. All he had to do was press it. His head turned until his eyes took in the window, the window sill, the floor beneath.

He pressed the button.

He did not know which came first—the flood of darkness or the first footfall. It was the leap from the window sill, accompanied by the muffled, tinkling sound. Now the footsteps were once more approaching the bed. They had almost reached it when his thumb found the button. Furniture and furnishings stood forth in the garish light. There was nothing else. But now he knew. He knew—and he was afraid.

He knew to a certainty that he was not alone. He was, in fact—he told himself—lying in bed in a haunted room. He did not wish, or dare, to reach for his watch. It must be, he estimated, almost midnight. Should he stay where he was, or flee? Yes, dress himself, then and there, and go to an all-night café. In the morning he could move back to the hotel on the rue Bonaparte or find another *pension*. But he did not stir.

There were new agitations. Suppose, he told himself, suppose the bulb should fail; was it not an old bulb, quite probably of pre-war vintage? What then? Still he continued to lie there. The bed was warm, the light reassuring. He even began to embroider his original speech.

". . . There you are."

"But, Madame, wait, I beg (implore?) of you. I thought I had been mistaken. I put out the light again. And then? Why, then I heard the footsteps once more. They were coming toward my bed. Naturally, I switched on the light. And, as you see, here I am."

This, to be sure, was somewhat lame. It had its preposterous side. He would be in pajamas, *la patronne* in a camisole or stays. She would exclaim, "But you must be mistaken, Monsieur! A ghost in my house! Perhaps you were dreaming. One often has the same dream over again. Ah, my poor one, you have been working too

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hard. Here, let me give you a cordial." And she would bumble about to find the bottle and a glass, which she would proffer with a shaking hand. Other doors might open. What would the chambermaid think?

Thus some minutes passed. Above him the light burned with a yellowish glare, above the pillow dangled the cord and switch. His eyes closed, opened, closed. He fell asleep. When he woke up he knew that he would put out the light a third time—and wait. After all, he could always raise his hand and press the button.

Several times he made a tentative movement, but always his hand fell back. Nevertheless, he knew that sooner or later he would complete the action. Better sooner? This was easier thought than done. But suddenly his arm went up and his hand closed around the switch. He pressed the button.

At the same moment the now familiar leap sounded from the window sill, accompanied as before by the muffled tinkle. The footfalls came closer. He felt a presence at the side of the bed, a presence which exuded cold as a human form casts a shadow. Still it came on, passing through his body from right side to left like a cold knife edge. When the light went on it was as though the maroon flowers had swallowed it up.

Douglas Hale lay there breathing hard in short, swift gasps. He had been convinced. He would experiment no more. Courage as well as curiosity had fled with that cold presence into the wall or wherever it went—he cared little where, so long as it remained at bay because of the light. He composed no more humorous dialogues. And he tried not to think of what might have happened if he had not pressed the button when he did; but, of course, his thoughts returned to it. What? What?

When daylight came he exulted. He packed his suitcase but did not take it or the typewriter with him. What would the *patronne,* the chambermaid, one of the ancient widows think—that he was trying to abscond?

He slipped out of the *pension,* left the rue Chaplin behind, and walked briskly down the Boulevard Raspail toward Saint Germain-des-Prés. Long before noon he had found another *pension,* this time on the rue St. Benoit, next to the Impasse of the Two Angels.

He sent a porter for his things, with enough money for his bill, a taxi, a tip, even a cognac en route. The porter was not surprised. Weren't all Americans rich? The truth, however, was otherwise with Douglas. He had only enough money to last him until he finished his book. And now he had to make up for lost time.

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His new home was pleasant enough, and the inhabitants were younger; but there was the rub. Most of them were students. He could hear them on the stairs at all hours. He decided to gamble Paris was not the only place in which to write; he had done a great deal of work elsewhere, and in particular, Provincetown. It would be cool there now, and bracing.

He gave himself persuasive arguments. He was not running away from anything—he could not have said what it was, in any case. He was merely protecting his book, the book that had unfolded so swiftly and so well, until Paris.

Douglas packed again. He flew to Boston and took the boat to Provincetown. The first person he saw when he stepped on the creaking pier was Miss Hesketh. It was as though she had been waiting for him.

"Maurice has been looking for you," she said.

"Maurice? Is he here?"

Douglas looked around.

"Yes," she said, fixing him with her bright eyes. Her face had the flushed look he disliked.

At that moment the truth flashed on him. He did not want to ask. But Miss Hesketh was already answering the unspoken question.

"He's dead," she confided.

Even with his foreboding her statement took Douglas by surprise.

"Dead!" he repeated.

"Yes," she said. "That's what the ignorant call it. I don't mean," she went on hurriedly, "that you are one of them. I said you were psychic, didn't I?"

He could have done without the compliment.

"Maurice," she threw in, "left you his money."

Douglas stared at her. And he didn't care for the way she stared back.

"But now," she went on, "he wants you to join him. It's a great compliment for those of us who are earthbound."

"Does he want you to join him, too?"

"Not yet. It's in his will that the money will go to me when you pass through the ivory gate. To further my research."

He was beginning to bristle. He was also frightened.

"And he's looking for me," he said dully, trying to avoid her gaze.

"Oh, not any more," she exclaimed.

He started to turn his head, but thought better of it.

"Why me?" he asked. It was almost a whine.

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"You'll see—he'll tell you everything when he visits you."

"Why can't he tell me when I'm with you?" he asked uneasily, without hope. With anyone—even Miss Hesketh in her darkened parlor.

"It will all be made clear—at the proper time," Miss Hesketh prophesied. "Perhaps tonight."

"How will I know it's Maurice?" he asked.

But deep down he knew the answer already.

"By a tinkling sound," she said. "He's very special that way. A muffled, tinkling sound."

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# BORN GAMBLER

***by THOMAS WALSH***

Jack Haggerty was a born gambler. He started as a small boy by shooting craps in a tenement cellar, and by playing penny-ante stud poker on a tenement rooftop. But at the age of 19, on his first visit to Belmont Park Race Track, something very bad happened to him. He played his two lucky numbers, nine and seven, and hit the daily double, both long shots, for $574.

From then on he was incurable. He loved Kitty Farrell very much, but twice their engagement was broken off. First he gambled away the money he had been saving to buy the engagement ring, and second, much more serious, he lost the $4,000, half of it hers, which had been intended as down payment for a house out on Long Island.

It took him three months to get back with Kitty that time. When aroused, she had more than her share of Irish temper, and Jack Haggerty, in true shameful fact, had to sit up and beg.

"But you just remember one thing," Kitty warned, holding him a few moments longer at arm's length. "The next time you place so much as a two-dollar show bet even on Spectacular Bid, it's going to be all over for you and me, Jack, and all over for good. I don't intend to live the rest of my life with a man I can't trust—and I won't do it. So will you swear to me now—never again, not as long as you live, no matter what? Just make up your mind. That's the promise you have to give me right here and right now. Will you?"

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So Jack Haggerty put his hand on his heart, lifted his eyes piously and honestly, and sincerely swore it to heaven. For two years then, promise kept, marriage accomplished, they were very happy. Kitty was a schoolteacher, and every morning after dropping her off at P.S. something-or-other, Haggerty drove on to a downtown precinct, where he was a second-grade detective under Inspector Iron Mike Birmingham. In the department there were two vastly different schools of thought concerning Iron Mike. The pro school believed he was the best police officer in the whole country, bar none. The con school believed he was the worst-tempered and most miserable human skunk that had ever drawn breath.

"But there's one thing you have to admit, anyway," Jerry Wilson argued one day after Haggerty had been given the full treatment by Iron Mike. "When he jumps on you, you deserve it, Haggerty, and you know damned well you do. But get in a jam, as we're all apt to sometimes, and Iron Mike will go to bat for you like he's your own father, and against anybody at all. I've seen him do it, too. So stop your complaining."

"If he was my own father, I'd change my name," Haggerty gritted. "I'm going to smack him one day, and I swear it to God, Jerry, I'm going to put him flat on his back. That miserable old buzzard. That stinking, no-good—"

"All right," Jerry said. "But I have an idea that if you ever try anything like that, he'll put you flat on yours. He's quite a man, Iron Mike is. You'd just better watch your step."

Which did not, of course, change Jack Haggerty's opinion. And it was even reinforced not long afterward, during a breathlessly humid July hot spell, when Haggerty gave the kiss of life to a pudgy little man who suddenly toppled over before him, on Madison Avenue and 63rd Street, with no one else but Jack Haggerty making any attempt to help out. A week or two later Haggerty was called in to Iron Mike's office and found the pudgy little man in there waiting for him, apparently sound as a dollar again. There were sincere thanks given, and a well-filled envelope extended, but Iron Mike cut that part short at once, with what Haggerty could only consider as the most vindictive and personally motivated dislike of him.

"Oh, no," Iron Mike said. "Nothing like that, sir. The department does not permit any monetary rewards for services performed in the line of duty, as this was. Give it back, Haggerty."

And Haggerty froze, his lips twitching.

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"Oh, it's just a little something by way of thanks," the pudgy man said. "And there's no one need ever find out, Inspector, but us three. Where's the harm?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid not," Iron Mike said. "Department regulations, sir. So do what I told you, Haggerty. Pass it back."

And Haggerty had to obey. There were more thanks and a shaking of hands all around, and then, the next morning, a phone call for Haggerty at the precinct. It was the pudgy man again.

"Still feel that there's something I ought to do for you," he said, "after what you did for me. I wouldn't want to get you in trouble with that sour-faced boss of yours, lad, but I still think I owe you. We might be able to do this thing another way, if you'd like. Do you ever lay a little bet on the ponies?"

"Not for quite a while," Haggerty told him. "Promised the wife. Besides, when I did, I never had a lot of luck, to tell you the truth."

"Well, let's see if maybe we can't change that," the pudgy man said. "The next time I hear of something good going, I'll give you a ring. Jack Haggerty, isn't it?"

And later that day, talking to Jerry Wilson again, Haggerty felt the top of his head soar up like Mount Everest.

"Well, just don't forget to pass it around," Jerry said, who also was a fancier of the sport of kings. "You couldn't get it any straighter from the horse's mouth, Jack. You know who that guy is, don't you? Happy Ned O'Brien."

And Happy Ned O'Brien was perhaps the leading horse trainer of his day. There was that promise to Kitty, of course—but how could she ever find out? No way in this world that Haggerty could see, and so Thursday morning, when Happy Ned called again, Haggerty went out and borrowed $300 cash at a nearby loan office, and put it all on the nose. Just this one last time, Haggerty swore to himself, and then never again. Might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, too. The hell with it! All on the nose, with Happy Ned giving the word.

And it proved to be a fairly good tip. Ramble On, Robert almost made it. He went off at 18 to 1, led all the way around, and came in a close third, photo finish. Damn it to hell! Just another inch or two, the width of a hand—and Jack Haggerty would have had over $5,000 in cold cash to bring home to Kitty!

It was maddening. Haggerty could not forget it, and on the next Saturday, therefore, telling Kitty that he was going to take in the ball game at Yankee Stadium, for the first time in two years he

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drove out to Belmont Race Track. He located Happy Ned in the paddock after the second race, and while having a drink together Happy Ned marked off the rest of Haggerty's card. It was wonderful. Haggerty got four winners, one second, and one third, and floated home that night with his $300 recouped, and with $300 more ahead of the game.

After that, as Kitty saw it, he became the most devoted Yankee fan in New York City. Never missed a Saturday or Sunday at the stadium any more, and in one delirious stretch Happy Ned marked off 14 out of 17 winners for him, including one that paid $76.

On the last racing day at Belmont, all or nothing, he did even better. Happy Ned gave him a horse named Keep Foolin! which had been Kitty's initials before he married her, Kitty Farrell, and it seemed to Haggerty that the only thing to do now, with that hunch going for him, was to keep riding the crest of the wave. So he bet the whole $6000 he was ahead by that time, putting every dollar of it on the nose. Keep Foolin' romped home in a breeze by four or five lengths, and paid off at twelve-something to two. That night, unable to believe it had really happened to him, Jack Haggerty bought an overnight bag, put more than $36,000 cash in it, and deposited the bag in his precinct locker.

He didn't know what else to do with it. He didn't dare bring it home. He knew Kitty. Even so, he had to swing her boisterously around in his arms at supper time, and smack her fanny. But he had been right about her. At once she pushed herself free, eyes flashing.

"I know that look," she declared dangerously. "So don't bother lying to me. You've broken your solemn promise, Jack Haggerty. You've been gambling again."

"Me?" Haggerty said, all unjustly accused innocence, but of course immediately discarding the story he had ready to tell about picking up an overnight bag on the subway, no identification at all, that had $36,798 inside.

Judging by the furious hot glitter in Kitty's eyes, it did not seem to be the right moment. "No, no, hon. And when did I ever break a promise I gave you? Tell me just one time. One time, Kitty. Go ahead."

"And I'm telling you," Kitty said, fists on hips, eyes with a menacing dark gleam in them, "not to bother thinking up some crazy cock-and-bull story about finding money in the street. I wouldn't care if you won eighty-six million dollars. I told you last time, and

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I meant it. If you won it gambling, Jack Haggerty, this marriage is over. Do you hear?"

So Haggerty, thanking his lucky stars that something had stopped him from telling her that found-on-the-subway story, kissed the lobe of her ear gently and attested his innocence to high heaven. But all that money was not a pleasure to him in the weeks that followed. It was a burden, rather, and he could not think what to do with it. At last, worried for its safety even in the precinct house, he took it home with him one night and hid it under some fishing tackle up on his closet shelf, way back, where Kitty would have no reason to go rummaging around for anything.

But even then it worried him. Every night when he got home he checked it first thing, and every morning when he got up he checked it again. What the hell could he do with it, Happy Ned being down in Florida now with his stable, and no more tips forthcoming? A bank? No. Kitty might find the bankbook. Then stocks, bonds, investments? No, again. She'd have asked questions about them, with her suspicion soon a dead certainty. And he knew Kitty, all right. If she walked out on him, as she had sworn she would . . .

Damned money, he began fretting. He had it now, more than he could ever have dreamed, but what could he do with it? He couldn't just throw it away, but if he didn't, an explanation would have to be given. What explanation? He began to sleep badly, waking up every hour with an idea that he had heard someone at the bedroom closet. One night he even got up to make sure, and Kitty stirred drowsily.

"What is it?" she said. "What in the world are you poking around for at this time of night?"

"Oh, nothing," Haggerty said. "Just putting a dirty shirt in the hamper, Kit. I forgot it before. Go back to sleep."

But he couldn't do that himself. He lay wakeful until first light, feeling a cold sweat on him. What to do? What to tell Kitty? How to get out of the thing? Nothing came to him, and soon the problem began to affect even his work.

"What's the matter with you?" Iron Mike demanded irritably one afternoon. "What I asked you for was the Bannister report, and what you brought in to me was the file on Little Louie Boardman. What's on your mind these days? Have you trouble at home?"

"No, no," Haggerty denied, grinning painfully. Trouble with Kitty! "Nothing like that, Inspector. It's just—well, I'm a little confused about something."

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"Then if you get any more confused," Iron Mike barked, "it won't be in this office, Haggerty. I've had enough of this damned carrying on of yours. You're about as useful to me these days as a boil on the backside. You'll do your work around here, and you'll do it well and properly, or I'll get someone who can. What the hell were you thinking of? Little Louie Boardman! He's doing ten to twenty up in Sing Sing right now, you damned fool, you. Get out of my sight!"

Haggerty could have bought a diamond necklace for Kitty that Christmas, and wanted to, but he didn't dare. He could have bought a new car, or splurged on a Florida vacation for them—but how could he explain all this sudden affluence? The money became like an old man of the mountain to him. Enough for half a dozen men, and all his, but what could he do with it?

In January, not eating or sleeping right, he caught a heavy cold, and had to spend a week at home in bed. He was just getting up and around again when he read in the paper that Happy Ned had suffered another heart attack down in Florida, this time a fatal one. So Haggerty toasted his memory with a wistful nip of the Irish whiskey that was one of the presents Kitty had given him for Christmas, and after lunch, when Jerry Wilson stopped by to see him, was well into the bottle, with nothing else to do.

Jerry had news.

"Looks like someone is watching out for you," he said. "This cold was the luckiest break you ever got in your life, Jack. Every Friday until now you and Ted Anderson worked as payroll guards for that department store downtown, didn't you?"

"Yeah, couple of months now," Haggerty said. "One of Iron Mike's big deals for me. We'd bring the paymaster around to the bank, wait till he got the payroll, and bring him back again. How's Ted?"

"No more worries," Jerry Wilson said. "He was shot dead today, along with Larry O'Neill, who took your place. Both of them, right through the back of the head. They didn't have a chance, even. It looks like somebody was waiting for them in that little hall closet on the eighth floor, where the offices are. Whoever it was, must have known the whole setup, time and all. He let them go by, way we figure, then eased out real quiet behind them, knocked off Ted and Larry like sitting ducks, laid the paymaster out cold, and grabbed the money. Nobody else around in the hall. Easy as pie. An inside job, of course.

"But we got one break. A girl clerk was coming up the service stairs, and right after she heard the shots this big fella comes racing

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down, and knocks her over. We got her at headquarters now looking at mug shots, but I don't know how much help she's going to be. You know how a witness like that is, all scared and upset."

They were still talking it over when an Assistant Commissioner named Frank Culkin arrived, with two plainclothes detectives and a slim brown-haired girl with tear-stained dark eyes. Culkin allowed her only one step into the room, holding her arm. Then she began crying again, nodded at him, and whispered something, after which Culkin led her out. He came back alone.

Culkin was a big powerful man, with square jaws and icily cold gray eyes.

The eyes fastened on Haggerty.

"Look over the whole place here," he ordered his men. "And I mean all of it, remember. Smart guys like this crummy heel sometimes do the stupidest things in the world. Start with that closet."

"Hey," Haggerty said, a bit whiskey-befuddled. "What's going on, Commissioner?"

Culkin walked up to the bed, bent down, and presented the icy gray eyes at a distance of three inches.

"Slimy little rat," he grated. "Who knew the routine better than you did? You've been on that assignment for three months. You knew the time, you knew how they went and how they came back, and you could pick your spot."

"Hey, wait a minute," Jerry Wilson said, getting up quickly, and looking a bit startled. "You ain't trying to accuse Haggerty of—"

"Don't have to accuse him," Culkin said, in a low hoarse growl. "No need any more. The girl just identified him."

"What?" Haggerty said, even more befuddled. "Why, I've been in bed all week, Commissioner. Ask Dr. Martin. He can tell you."

"Don't tempt me," Culkin said, presenting a fist, also at a distance of three inches, that was almost the size of a kitchen meatblock. "You dirty yellow rat. Shut your mouth."

"I will like hell," Haggerty said, struggling up. "You can't talk to me like that. I don't care if you are—"

"Commissioner," one of the other men said. "Take a look in this here bag for a minute. Packed with dough."

And Jack Haggerty, turning his head a bit dazedly on the pillow, with Irish whiskey spilling all over his pajama top from the sudden wild start he had made, found himself gaping numbly at the overnight bag—the scrubby-looking little bag, open now, that had $36,798 cash in it . . .

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They brought Haggerty downtown. They sat him in the back of a police car with one of Culkin's men on each side, and two more men up front, but during the whole trip nobody addressed so much as a word to him. There was early February dark outside, with rain falling, and Haggerty, although not usually a drinking man, would have very much liked another drop of the Irish by that time. He felt weak and even a bit dizzy after his week in bed, and he could not think straight.

It didn't seem to be really happening—Jack Haggerty not one of the hunters any more, but now one of the hunted. His world had enlarged. He kept twisting his hands in his lap, very foolishly, with the fellows on his right and left watching every move he made. The street lamps looked all blurry to him, and the people they passed, ordinary citizens going here and there on ordinary business, seemed light years distant.

Even when they got him downtown, to where the thing had happened about 11:30 that morning, they persisted with the silent treatment. They sat him on a chair in the hall outside the paymaster's office, and even the men with whom he had worked in the department avoided looking at him. He lit a cigarette, and had it slapped away by one of Culkin's assistants. After that he just sat there, head lowered miserably, fingers twisting and turning over each other just a second or two after he managed to stop them the previous time.

Culkin reappeared. Mysteriously whispered conferences with this one and that one; instructions given and obeyed; and Haggerty, wetting his lips nervously, shifting from one side to the other. He did not volunteer any information about the money. He knew how it was going to sound. Happy Ned wasn't around any more to back him up. Who was ever going to believe the thing? But what else could he tell them?

He wouldn't even have Kitty as a witness. He hadn't told Kitty. He hadn't told anyone. And he hadn't bought his $6,000 worth of win tickets from one clerk, who might possibly have remembered him even after six months, but from a lot of different ones. So his whole story had to sound ridiculous. Haggerty wouldn't have believed it himself from another man.

And of course they knew how to put the screws on. They kept him in that chair in the hall for three solid hours, and not a word spoken to him. Four o'clock, five o'clock, six o'clock—and at six Kitty would be home from work.

"Would you call the wife, Harry?" he asked one of Culkin's men

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at that hour. "She's going to be worried about what happened to me. When she left this morning, I was still in bed. Let her know, will you? Just tell her I've been called down on something to Inspector Birmingham's office."

"Yeah, sure," Culkin's man said. "We'll send Buffalo Bill up there with a special message by Pony Express. We're all real worried about how she'll feel, and about you. Then you want him to drop off a message to Mrs. Anderson, and Mrs. O'Neill? Right? Anything you say, Haggerty. Just sit there and keep your stinking mouth shut. Men you worked with!"

But at 6:20 Culkin opened the door to the paymaster's office and beckoned. Inside, a man stood grimly, arms folded, on each side of Haggerty's chair, while Culkin, sitting behind the desk, riffled through a looseleaf notebook. Haggerty knew what they were doing—building up the pressure—but it did not help him at all to know the procedure. He had to wipe sweat from his mouth, and wipe it again and again. It was at least ten minutes before Culkin finished with the notebook and put it aside.

"First, then," Culkin began, his eyes boring into Haggerty's skull like steel drills. "Just a little matter of $36,798 in cash, and in your bedroom closet at home, Haggerty. Where did you get that money? How do you account for it?"

"Found it in the street," one of the men said.

"No, no," the other one said. "His own private little piggy bank, Walter. Drop a nickel or a dime in every so often and you'd be surprised how quick it adds up. Right, Haggerty?"

Iron Mike came in. He didn't look at Haggerty. At the desk he and Culkin murmured together, and Iron Mike studied the notebook.

He was a wiry man of perhaps 50, with hair beginning to gray and a hard solid mouth. When he had finished with the notebook, still without looking at Haggerty, he scratched his cheekbone.

"How much money was taken?" he asked Culkin.

"About $240,000," Culkin said. "I'd say if he did it alone, and he could have, the rest of it we just haven't found in the apartment yet, or else he's got it hidden someplace else. Maybe he had someone waiting for him in the getaway car downstairs and they split it up right there. The two possible answers, I'd say. Well, Haggerty? Where did you get all that money? Mind telling us?"

And Haggerty did exactly the wrong thing. He was still groping desperately for an answer, and unable to find one. He took too long

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to explain it, much too long. His hands twisted, and he felt his eyes jerk miserably from one office wall to the other.

"I won it," he said.

"Oh?" Culkin said. "Very interesting. Then who did you win it from? When? Where? How?"

"I can swear it to God," Haggerty pleaded, but without convincing even himself. "And the Inspector can back me up on that. I won it through Happy Ned O'Brien, Inspector. Remember last summer, when he wanted to give me some money for the kiss of life I brought him back with, and you told him I couldn't take it? He started passing me tips on the horses. That's how I won it. You can ask Jerry Wilson. All of us bet on it together the first time."

So they called Jerry Wilson in. "Well, yeah, the first time," Jerry Wilson said. "But it ran out. That's all I know."

"Sure, it did," Haggerty said, sweating even more now. "Only I lost $300 on it, and it almost came in, so I figured if he could give me one tip as good as that, maybe he could give me some others. So I went out to Belmont every Saturday and Sunday, when I was off, and looked him up, and had him mark my card. One day he gave me seven winners out of nine. One day he gave me six out of nine. So after a couple of months—"

"How about nine out of nine?" Culkin said, lips curling. "Or ten out of nine. Wilson's a good friend of yours. But did you ever let him in on the thing?"

"Well, no," Haggerty had to admit. "He was sore as hell when the first one lost and told me not to bother him again. Besides that, I used to go out alone to the track, and lay my bets alone. They were all just on that day's card, Commissioner. I didn't have no way to pass it around."

"Of course. Didn't have time," Culkin nodded, speaking out of the side of his mouth to Iron Mike. "So just since this last summer, all by yourself, you beat the game for over $36,000? What did your wife think? Did you let her in on it?"

"Didn't want me to bet," Haggerty muttered, avoiding all the eyes on him. "Said she'd leave me if I ever did it again. That's why I had the money hidden away. I didn't know what the hell to do with it. You don't know Kit. Once she says somthing—"

"Are you trying to tell us that not even your wife knew?" Iron Mike put in. "Your own wife?"

Haggerty looked down and found his two hands twining worse than ever.

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"Nobody knew," he burst out. "I was afraid, I tell you. Afraid to put it in the bank, or buy stocks, or anything. She might have found out then. It's the truth, Inspector. I wish I'd never seen that damn money!"

"Yes," Culkin said. "I imagine you do—now, anyway. But let's look at the other side of the thing. One, you knew the procedure that was followed here every payday. Two, this morning you were sick in bed, or pretended to be. Three, there was no one in the apartment, so you could have got up, come down here with your friend the getaway driver, or in a cab, maybe, and been home again by twelve noon. Four, the girl identified you. Five, the $36,000 in cash you had—just a few dollars spending money, eh? No good, Haggerty. You can save us and yourself a lot of trouble by admitting the thing here and now."

"Who's the girl?" Iron Mike asked.

So she was brought in.

"I think so," she said. "Yes, I'm sure. He had on a gray overcoat and a gray hat."

"Another point," Culkin said. "Do you have a gray overcoat and a gray hat, Haggerty?"

"Do you?" Haggerty shot back. "Don't about three million guys in New York City?"

"Just moderate your tone," Iron Mike ordered. "That does you no good at all, Haggerty. What did the paymaster see?"

They brought in the paymaster. He was a timid and edgy little man named Knowlton, and there was a white patch of bandage over his right ear.

"Everything was just the same as usual," he told Culkin. "Or at least until we got off the elevator up here on the eighth floor. Then we walked past the closet door, and the next thing I know I hear two shots. I was just starting to turn around when I got hit."

"Who hit you?" Culkin said. "This fellow?"

"Might have been," Knowlton said. "His build, anyway. Just got a flash of him, though—and low down, the way I was ducking. Black shoes, and dark-blue or black pants. That's all I'm sure of."

"You were given no warning at all?" Iron Mike wanted to know. "You heard nothing but the two shots?"

"Well, maybe I heard the closet door come open," Knowlton said shakily. "Kind of a creak, you know. I complained yesterday about it. But then everything happened so fast—"

"Of course," Culkin said. "It had to. You all knew him. So if you

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got even one quick look at who it was—that's why he had to kill Anderson and O'Neill, Birmingham. He was taking no chances."

"Yes, plain enough," Iron Mike said. "Unfortunately. Well, that's it I guess. I think you've got everything you need, Commissioner."

"Inspector," Haggerty said, jumping up. Like your own father, he remembered Jerry Wilson telling him; stand right up there for any of his people who ever got in a jam, and against anybody, even as important a man as Frank Culkin. "I'm telling you God's truth! I did win that money. And I was afraid to tell Kit about it."

Iron Mike walked up to him, slapped him across the mouth full force, and slapped him again.

"Two men who worked with you," he said savagely. "Two decent men. You low cowardly scut, you. You rotten, cringing—take him in, Commissioner. He's your man."

They handcuffed Haggerty. They brought him down in the elevator to the basement garage, and there they put him into a car. Two more of Culkin's men sat with him, one on each side.

"And just try making a break for it," one of them suggested. "Just try, Haggerty. Nothing I'd like better. I'd give you one step, then put three bullets into the back of your head, the way you did this morning, just to make sure. I don't think you have a chance in hell of getting away with this, but if you do you won't live long. Take my word, Haggerty. Anderson and O'Neill had a lot of friends, a hell of a lot. You wait and see."

Haggerty sat crouched between them. Kit, Kit . . . That was all he could think of. In the dark garage figures moved, then stopped moving.

"What are we waiting for?" the other Culkin man asked.

"Don't know," his partner said. "Iron Mike told us to. He was talking to the maintenance man up in the hall when I came down, and he said sit in the car and wait for him. Guess we have to."

They waited about 20 minutes. Everything dark, hushed, shadowy; square concrete pillars, empty cars, no one moving. It seemed to Haggerty that he couldn't feel anything, or even think normally. Time after time he would find himself squeezing his eyes shut or turning his head from right to left quickly, but nothing helped. Oh, Kit. Oh, Kit, Kit . . .

Then the elevator came down and yellow light splotched out into the garage. Iron Mike, Culkin, some others. After that the elevator doors closed and everything got dark again. Silence all around; deep, beating silence; not a sound, not a movement. It lasted perhaps ten

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minutes. Then the elevator door opened again.

The girl got off it this time carrying a gift box, and Knowlton the paymaster, and two or three other men. Good nights were said, and the other people got into a car to the left of the one in which Haggerty was sitting. Knowlton and the girl turned right, and Knowlton unlocked the door of a black sedan. The light came on, and when it did, Iron Mike and Culkin appeared out of the shadows. Other men circled in around the car.

"Just another question," Iron Mike said, bending over on the driver's side. "But only the one, sir. What does your lady friend have in that gift package?"

"You stupid fool," Iron Mike said, regarding Haggerty with disdain up in the street. "You always were, and I suppose you always will be. But two things struck me right away, since you want to know. First, if you had to shoot down Anderson and O'Neill like that, just because they'd have recognized you, there was another fellow present who'd have had to do the same thing because they'd have recognized him, too. Now who would that be, Haggerty?"

"Knowlton," Haggerty said. "Of course. Now I see it."

"Yes, now," Iron Mike said. "How very open and shut it is to you after everything is explained. You haven't got the brains of a bat, Haggerty. Then I talked to the maintenance man, and he told me that he'd oiled the hinges on that closet door upstairs at eleven ten this morning, while they were all out at the bank getting the payroll money. And you might remember that when I pressed Knowlton upstairs, he admitted that he'd had a bit of warning, to cover himself up. He said that he'd heard the closet door squeak when it opened. But it didn't squeak any more, because I tried it myself. It had been oiled, which Knowlton didn't know. He was lying about it. Why? That's when I decided to give you those two slaps across the mouth, Haggerty. Injured your manly pride, did they?"

"I couldn't believe it," Haggerty said. "Turning on me like that. Acting like you were sure I was the one."

"Didn't I have to?" Iron Mike demanded irritably. "Where the hell are your brains? Knowlton had to be convinced, don't you see, that we all thought the case was decided and settled, and that you were the killer. Once he believed that, he might turn cocky enough to drop himself right into our hands, and he did.

There wasn't much time this morning, you know. I'd say he got a step back of Anderson and O'Neill, shot them both, then ran over

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to the stairs door and threw the bag with the payroll in it down to the girl, who was all ready and waiting. Then he ran back, smashed his head into the wall to make it look good and pretended to be knocked cold when somebody ran out to see what the shots were for.

"Well, if I was right, Haggerty, if that was the answer, then neither he nor the girl had a chance to get away with the money this morning. They had to hide it somewhere, and this department store is a damned big building, remember. It would have taken us a full week to go over every nook and cranny of it, every counter and storage room, and God knows if they couldn't have got someone else to carry off the money for them, meanwhile. Probably five thousand people a day walk out of a store like this carrying packages with them. There would be just no way to check every one of them.

"But it seemed to me that there was a better chance. Convince Knowlton that we were positive it was you, and that no one had even a suspicion of him, and I hoped that he and the girl might be so crazy wild to get their hands on the money once and for all, they might decide to slip it out tonight, with nothing more to worry about from their viewpoint. Which they did—but unfortunately found us down in the garage waiting for them. And that's it, Haggerty. Any more questions from you?"

"I guess only one," Haggerty said, moving after him to a taxicab at the curb. "What the hell am I going to tell Kitty, Inspector?"

"Try the truth," Iron Mike bawled back at him through the cab window. "And she knows it already, from what Culkin's men must have put her through by now. I hear she's all by herself at home, crying her eyes out, so there'll never be a better time for you. She isn't worried any more about your broken promise, you great big idiot. The only thing she's afraid of now is that she's lost you forever. But no girl ever born could leave a fellow like you all alone and defenseless in this hard cruel world. So brace yourself, Haggerty, and let me get home to my supper, damn it. I don't know why I even bothered to come over here tonight."

"I know," Haggerty said, a humble and foolish grin on his lips. "Jerry Wilson told me. I'm one of your men, Inspector."

"Arrgh," Iron Mike grunted, looking out at him in an altogether disgusted fashion, and then waving the driver on.

And he was right about Kitty, too. The moment Jack Haggerty unlocked his apartment door that night, she jumped up off the couch, screamed his name wildly, screamed it again—and darted as true and straight into his arms as a homing pigeon.

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**a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by**

**EDWARD D. HOCH**

*Dr. Sam Hawthorne, the retired G.P. and country doctor, goes back more than fifty years and recounts another "impossible crime" that has been stored away in his memory attic. The crime this time came on the heels—on the cloven hoofs—of Mabel Foster's warning: "You get rid of this man! He's in league with the Devil! If he stays here Satan himself will come!" Did Satan really visit Northmont back in 1929? . . .*

# THE PROBLEM OF THE PILGRIMS WINDMILL

***by EDWARD D. HOCH***

Dr. Sam Hawthorne filled the glasses and settled back in his chair. "This time I promised to tell you about what happened when we opened the new Pilgrim Memorial Hospital in Northmont, back in March of 1929. I'd been practicing medicine in the town for seven years by that time, and the idea of a hospital all our own was something to fill me with wonder and delight. Dr. Bob Yale, who'd come to Northmont the year before the hospital opened, landed a job on their staff. I was offered one myself, but I told them I wanted to keep on bein' a plain old G.P. As it turned out, though, I was summoned to the hospital before it had been open a week, to investigate one of the strangest crimes I ever encountered. It was like something Mister Chesterton might have written about, and if he had I suppose he would have called it *The Devil in the Windmill* . . ."

On March fourth (Dr. Sam continued) Herbert Hoover was inaugurated as the 31st President of the United States. On the fol-

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lowing day Pilgrim Memorial Hospital opened its doors for the first time. It was located just outside of town on land that had belonged to the Collins family for generations. When they donated the land for a hospital there was only one stipulation—the old Dutch windmill on the property should remain standing.

People are always startled to see windmills in New England, but there are still a few around. You pass one on Cape Cod, on the road to Provincetown, and I think the one at Northmont is still standing too. When people passing through town asked about Northmont's windmill they were usually reminded that the Pilgrims had come to America by way of The Netherlands, and the *Mayflower*'s companion ship, the *Speedwell*, actually sailed from The Netherlands before being forced to turn back. I suppose that had something to do with the Collins family windmill being called the Pilgrims windmill, though to tell the truth it wasn't built till the middle of the 19th Century and had mighty little to do with Pilgrims.

Anyway, it looked right nice standing there in front of Pilgrim Memorial Hospital. Its four wooden vanes still turned slowly when the wind blew, even though the mill was no longer in use. Inside was a good-sized room where an exhibit of Northmont history had been prepared. The building itself was made of fieldstone, which helped to give it an aged look that might have dated back to Pilgrim times. Some of the windmill's gears and wheels were still in place overhead, and I glanced up at them as I toured the place with my nurse April and half a hundred other honored guests.

"Was this place ever used as a mill?" I asked her.

"I guess so, long before I was born." She grinned at me. "Folks say Randy Collins's pa hid a fortune in gold somewhere in the windmill, but no one was ever able to find it."

"If you believe that story I'll tell you the one about the little green men. Randy Collins isn't the sort who'd give anything away that belonged to him. When he donated the land and this windmill, he was darn sure there was no gold or anything else around."

"I suppose you're right," she agreed. We passed through the historical exhibit and left the windmill, starting up the curving driveway to the hospital itself. It was a low two-story brick building that had a wide front and two wings on the back. Some folks had snorted at the idea of an eighty-bed hospital in Northmont, but the town planners figured you had to build for tomorrow's needs and there was no doubt the region was growing. Of course all the beds weren't in use yet, so they'd opened with a limited staff of doctors and

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nurses—but even here there was a problem, and as April and I approached the hospital's main entrance I saw the problem standing in the doorway to greet us.

His name was Lincoln Jones, and he was the first black doctor the people of Northmont had ever seen.

It was not a good time for blacks in the north or the south. The Ku Klux Klan was once again active and I'd heard about a cross burning just a month earlier in another part of the state. But Lincoln Jones was a good doctor, a young man who specialized in children's illnesses. There weren't too many specialists around in those days, and I figured we were mighty lucky to have him in Northmont.

Dr. Bob Yale was standing at Lincoln Jones's side to greet us. "Welcome to Pilgrim Memorial, Dr. Sam. How's it look?"

"The windmill exhibit was fine. Now I'm looking over the hospital."

"You know Dr. Jones?"

I shook hands with the black man. He was tall and handsome, probably in his early thirties like me. "We met briefly the other day but we haven't had a chance to talk. I hope you'll find the community to your liking, Dr. Jones."

He smiled. "I guess you'd better be calling me Lincoln. I think we'll be working close a lot of the time."

"I hope so." Then, while Lincoln Jones chatted with April, I took Bob Yale aside. "Any more trouble about him, Bob?"

"Nothing we can't handle here. The hospital administrator, Dr. Seeger, had a few telephone calls complaining about a black doctor. You know the sort. But I think it'll blow over."

I nodded and walked on with him across the hospital lobby. It was tastefully decorated with a few landscape paintings, and there was an admissions desk that made the place look like a hotel lobby. I recognized bald-headed Dr. Seeger standing behind it. Seeger was around 60, a businessman first and a doctor second. I didn't much like him but I had to admit he'd been mainly responsible for getting Randy Collins to donate the land for the hospital.

"What do you think of it, Dr. Sam?" he asked.

"I think you're off to a great start. A place this size, you'll be able to treat patients from three counties."

Seeger laughed without mirth. "We'll have to if we want to cover the overhead. This is an expensive place to run, and it's even more expensive with eighty empty beds."

Randy Collins and his wife Sara Jane came down the stairs from

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the second floor. Seeing Randy was no treat—his big broad-shouldered figure and glowering face were familiar sights at the town council meetings where he'd been known to argue half the night over some minor resolution. But Sara Jane was indeed a treat. She was slim and cool and lovely, a honey-blonde with never a hair out of place. I could have looked at her all day and dreamed of her all night. They were familiar figures on whatever small social scene Northmont possessed.

Randy was a man in his early forties, conservative and set in his ways. "Can't say I approve of all your new gadgets," he told Seeger, "but then I don't have to approve. I only donated the land."

"Let me show you our operating room," Dr. Seeger said, leading him off down the first-floor corridor.

"Operating rooms aren't for me," Sara Jane decided, lingering close to me. She was a good ten years younger than her husband, and that along with her fresh openness had led to the usual small-town rumors. Some of the older women had even called her a "flapper," a word they'd discovered from reading the magazines of the day.

"Me neither," I agreed. "I'm just a country doctor."

Suddenly she tugged on my arm. "Damn! There's Isaac Van Doran and I don't want to see him!"

I steered her down a corridor before Van Doran could spot us. He was a muscular if slow-witted young man who ran Northmont's only gas station. Tongues had been set wagging when he'd been seen once riding in Sara Jane's roadster, but she insisted later he was only checking out her steering wheel.

"What have you got against Van Doran?" I asked with a smile.

"He and Randy don't get along. When Randy goes in there for gas they hardly talk."

"And you don't want to upset your husband."

"Well, Randy is very good to me." She fluttered her lashes as she said it, and I decided she'd been seeing too many moving pictures. Next thing I knew she'd be pulling a whiskey flask out of her stocking top.

We'd reached the end of the corridor and turned back. I could see there was some sort of commotion in the lobby and I wondered what the trouble was. "It's probably my husband," Sara Jane said with a resigned sigh, but we quickly saw that it wasn't.

A shabbily dressed woman, whom I recognized as Mabel Foster from up on Hill Road, had confronted Dr. Jones and was pointing

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a knobby finger at the black doctor. "You get rid of this man!" she screeched. "He's in league with the Devil! If he stays here Satan himself will come!"

Her words sent a chill down my spine, not for Lincoln Jones or for the coming of Satan but only for this poor deranged creature. I'd treated her off and on over the years, listening calmly to her claims of psychic power. But now, confronting our new black doctor, the hatred of generations had come boiling to the surface.

Luckily for everyone, April moved quickly to her side, comforting her with murmured reassurance as she moved her out the door. Dr. Seeger tried to laugh it off. "Did you put her up to that, Randy?" he asked Collins.

"Hardly!" Sara Jane's husband answered, visibly shaken. "Too bad something like that had to spoil the opening. Let's hope Mabel's psychic powers are all in her imagination."

"I'm sure they are," Lincoln Jones said with a smile. "Things like that don't disturb me, and I trust they won't disturb anyone else. It's something I learned to live with a long time ago."

April came back in after a bit. "I managed to get her in her carriage and headed for home," she said. "That woman should be locked away, Dr. Sam."

"Sometimes she's as sane as the two of us. I wish I was better equipped to help her."

We left the hospital shortly after that. I never did get up to the second floor that day, but it didn't matter. Within a week I'd be spending a great deal of time there.

The call came late on Sunday night, close to twelve. Pilgrim Memorial Hospital had been open five days by that time, but the word around town was that it had yet to admit its first patient. A pregnant farm wife had delivered her baby at home, as she had on three previous occasions, and a man who broke his leg had insisted on being driven to the old hospital in the next county because, he said, they knew him there.

So I was a bit surprised to hear Bob Yale's voice on the line, summoning me with something close to panic. "You'd better come over to the hospital mighty quick, Sam. We need you here."

"What's happened?" I asked. "A train accident?" It was the first thing that popped into my head.

"A fire. I'll tell you when you get here."

Winter had delivered a late blow that night, and about an inch

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of snow covered the ground. That wasn't too unusual for the tenth of March, but we'd been spoiled by a relatively mild season and I'd thought we'd seen the last of the snow. When I reached the hospital I saw lanterns in the road and the town's fire truck pulled up by the Pilgrims windmill. The building itself didn't appear damaged, and the vanes with their canvas covering were turning slowly in the night breeze.

Bob Yale came running up to my car and I saw that his hands and arms were bandaged.

"What happened to you?" I asked.

"Burned myself. Not serious."

"You're the hospital's first patient!"

There was no humor on his face when he replied. "No, I'm not. Randy Collins was badly burned. We don't know if he'll live."

"Randy! What's been happening here?"

His face reflected the flickering red glow from the firemen's lanterns. "I was coming off duty about an hour ago, and as I went out to my car I saw a flash of light through the window of the windmill. It looked like a fire and I walked out to investigate. I thought some kids might have gotten in there, and I saw a single set of footprints in the fresh snow leading to the door."

As he talked we moved through the crowd of firemen and hospital staff to the door in question. I saw Dr. Seeger come out of the building, stepping nimbly over a fire hose. "Hello, Sam. Is Bob filling you in on what happened?"

I said he was, and for the first time the thought struck me that I wasn't here as a doctor. Seeger and Yale had phoned me because of something else—some mystery they couldn't explain. "What about Collins?" I asked Bob.

"I heard him scream before I reached the door. I pushed it open and saw him standing in the center of the room, covered with flames."

"The room was on fire?"

"Not the room—just Randy Collins. He staggered around, smashing the glass on some of the historical display cases. I was close to panic myself. There was nothing to wrap him in, to smother the flames. Finally I just grabbed him and yanked him out the door and rolled him in the snow. There was nothing else I could do."

"That was a brave act," I told him.

"Brave or foolish. That's how I burned my arms."

"Is he up at the hospital now?"

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Bob Yale nodded. "We had to give him a sedative. The burns on his body are terrible."

"Did he say anything?"

"Just one word—Lucifer. He kept repeating it."

"Lucifer. He must have remembered what old Mabel Foster said about the devil."

I looked around at the inside of the windmill. The floor in the center of the room was badly scorched, and there was evidence that Randy's flailing body had set fire to some of the display cases as well. But the firemen had extinguished it quickly. The stone walls of the mill were undamaged, of course. I stepped carefully around some broken glass from the display cases and peered up toward the high ceiling. There was enough lantern light to make out the wind shaft and gears—and enough light to see that no one was hiding up there. I thought I saw a tiny piece of something red, but I couldn't be sure. "I checked with Dr. Seeger, who was in charge of the exhibit. He assured me nothing inflammable was left inside."

"What do the firemen think?"

Bob Yale shrugged. "They don't know either. He just caught fire."

The room had been wired with electric lights for the exhibit, but no one had thought to turn them on. I flicked the switch now and the bulbs lit. "It's not the electrical wiring," I said.

"One fireman thought he smelled gasoline."

I frowned. "Do you think someone tried to kill Collins by burning him to death?"

"I'd think that except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"There were no other footprints in the snow, Sam. Randy Collins was alone in this windmill when it happened."

We waited at the hospital until Dr. Jones finished dressing Collins' burns as best he could. Then he came into the corridor to talk with us. "I thought you specialized in children's illnesses," I said.

"I treated a few burn cases in children. Seeger figured I was the burn expert on the staff."

"Will he pull through?"

Lincoln Jones ran a hand through his thick black hair. "It's in the hands of the Lord now. But I'm hoping he'll make it."

"Is he conscious?" I asked. "Could I talk to him?"

"He's heavily sedated but he was talking a bit. I'll give you one minute with him if it's absolutely necessary." He wagged a finger

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at me to emphasize the point. "Not a second more—he's my patient!"

I entered the room and stood by the bed, looking down at the burned man. Randy Collins must have sensed my presence because he opened his eyes. "Dr. Sam . . ." His voice was barely a whisper.

"What happened to you, Randy? What happened at the windmill?"

"I . . ."

"You kept saying *Lucifer.*"

"Driving by . . . saw light in the windmill . . . flickering light like a fire . . . went in and . . . it was the Devil, Dr. Sam . . . just like that woman said . . . a ball of flame just enveloped me . . ."

Lincoln Jones tapped me on the shoulder. "Sorry, Sam. Your minute's up. Let him sleep now."

Randy Collins closed his eyes and I followed Jones out of the room. Sara Jane was in the corridor, her eyes swollen with tears. "What happened to him? Will he be all right?"

Yale filled her in on what little he knew. Then she turned to me again. "What happened to him, Sam?"

I could only hold out my hands helplessly. "We just don't know, Sara Jane. We just don't know."

By Wednesday Randy Collins had recovered enough to have visitors, and Lincoln Jones was grinning broadly as he studied the chart at the end of the bed. "You're out of danger, Mr. Collins. You're going to live."

Collins shifted his gaze from the black doctor to me and asked, "What about my face, Sam? And my skin?"

"They can do amazing things these days. As soon as you're strong enough Dr. Jones plans to send you by ambulance to a hospital in Boston that specializes in burn cases. They'll use plastic surgery and skin grafts to make you as good as new."

"I'll be like this for years!"

"But consider the alternative," Jones pointed out. "If Bob Yale hadn't rushed in to save your life, we'd be burying you today."

"How are his hands?"

"Not as bad as yours. You were both lucky there was snow on the ground."

"Have you remembered anything else about the fire?" I asked.

"Seems like I've told it a hundred times around. It was a ball of fire floating there, just enveloping me. All I could think of was Mabel Foster's predictions of Satan." He glanced pointedly at Lincoln Jones.

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"Well, the Devil's not going to drive me away from this job," Jones responded. "I've seen the Devil wearing a white sheet and delivering a speech, and that didn't scare me. I guess a ball of fire doesn't scare me either."

During those first days when he could have visitors, it seemed that half of Northmont trooped out to the hospital to see Randy Collins. While Sara Jane hovered near his bed, most of the town council put in an appearance and even Sheriff Lens drove out to pay a visit. We hadn't needed his services yet because no one could figure out if there'd been a crime or not. If there was a criminal involved—one who'd tried to murder Randy Collins—he'd have had to be invisible.

"Think somebody slipped one of them there infernal devices into his pocket?" Sheriff Lens asked as we left the hospital building and strolled down toward the windmill.

"Without his knowing it? That's hardly possible, Sheriff. Besides, he insists the fireball was already inside the place when he entered it."

"Don't they keep it locked at night?"

"It was left open because of the exhibit. There was nothing to steal here."

We went inside and I saw that the fire damage had not been repaired since Sunday night. The floor was still scorched and broken glass still littered the area. Something caught my eye and I stooped to pick it up. It was a thick piece of curved glass.

"What's that, Doc?" Sheriff Lens asked.

"Just a piece of glass. This place should be swept out before someone cuts himself."

"Who's in there?" a voice called suddenly from outside. I walked to the doorway and saw it was Isaac Van Doran.

"Just us, Isaac—the sheriff and me."

"Thought it might be that devil Randy seen," Van Doran said with a chuckle.

"What brings you out here?"

"Come to visit him. That's the least I can do."

I was surprised by that. "Didn't know you two were all that friendly."

"Hell, we're not enemies. He's been a customer of mine for years—him and Sara Jane both. It's good business to come see him."

I knew Sara Jane had gone home for lunch and I wondered if Isaac had purposely chosen a time when she wouldn't be there. We

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watched him walk up to the hospital and Sheriff Lens asked, "What do you make of him, Doc? Think maybe he tried to kill Randy so's he could run off with Sara Jane?"

"You've been listening to the town gossip too much, Sheriff. If Van Doran had tried to kill him I'm sure Randy Collins wouldn't be covering it up."

"Then you believe this devil business?"

"I don't know. But I think it's time I called on Mabel Foster."

I was driving along the highway toward Mabel's place on the hill when I happened to spot her horse and buggy. I wondered where she was going and decided to follow along at a short distance. It wasn't easy making the car run that slow but I managed—and I was rewarded for my patience when I saw her turning into the driveway of the Collins house. A few snow flurries were just beginning to fall.

I parked down the road and went the rest of the way on foot, arriving just in time to see Mabel Foster confronting Sara Jane at the front door. "I warned them all—I warned them and they laughed at me! Now your husband is on his bed of pain—and that won't be the end of it!"

"Get away from here!" Sara Jane screamed. "I'll call the police!"

Mabel made a pass with her fist as I hurried up to grab her. "Time to go home," I told her quietly.

"Let go, Dr. Sam! Let go!"

But I managed to get her back to her buggy. "You've got to behave, Mabel, or people will want to lock you away."

"The Devil will guide me! Satan is my master!"

"And it was Satan that burned Randy Collins?"

"Of course! I warned you all it was coming!"

"Why Collins?"

"Don't you see? Because he donated the land for the hospital!"

"And who will be burned next?"

"Seeger!" She almost spat out the name. "He's the one who hired the black doctor—Seeger is next!" She raised her buggy whip and I thought for an instant she would strike me. But her target was the horse's back and the blow galvanized him into action. Horse and buggy took her down the road with the snow flying around her.

I walked back to the doorway where Sara Jane stood. She was trembling so bad she had to hold the door for support. "God, she frightened me half to death! I'm so glad you came by, Dr. Sam. Come in and have some coffee."

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"You need something to calm you down."

"Do you think she tried to kill Randy? To make her crazy prediction come true?"

"I doubt if she'd be capable of it."

Sara Jane poured two cups of coffee and then nervously picked up a box of friction matches to light a cigarette. Not many women in Northmont smoked, but for Sara Jane it was part of her flapper image.

"If someone did try to kill Randy they might try again at the hospital."

Her words reminded me of something. "Isaac Van Doran came to visit him this noon. Did you know that?"

She shook her head. "I only see Isaac at his station. Those stories about us were foolish."

"I'm sure they were." I finished my coffee and stood up. "I have to be going. I was on my way over to see Mabel Foster but I guess I've seen her now."

"If you go back to the hospital tell Randy I'll be over in a little while."

I didn't go back to the hospital right away, though. I had my own patients to consider, and April was waiting for me back at the office with a sheaf of phone messages. It was late afternoon before I returned to Pilgrim Memorial. Bob Yale told me they'd admitted two more patients that morning—a broken leg and an appendix case—but neither was a patient of mine. People in the surrounding towns were beginning to realize that the new hospital was open at last, and I had no doubts about its future.

"How are your arms?" I asked, because I hadn't seen him that morning when I chatted with Sheriff Lens.

He patted the bandages. "Coming along. I'm going to unwrap them in a day or so and see if the air will help them heal faster. It's more a nuisance than anything else."

Sara Jane was visiting with Collins, so I didn't disturb them. Instead I went down to Seeger's office on the ground floor. He looked up from a mass of paperwork as I entered. "Hello, Sam. What can I do for you?"

I told him about my encounter with Mabel Foster and her threat against his life. "That woman should be locked up," he muttered. "But thanks for the warning. I won't go anywhere near the windmill—or any fireplaces, for that matter."

"How's the hospital coming?"

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Seeger shrugged. "Three patients, with another coming in tomorrow. I've no doubt some people are staying away because of Lincoln Jones, but I think they'll come around sooner or later. We have a good hospital here, with modern equipment, and that's what will win them over."

I left Seeger's office and spent some time chatting with a couple of nurses. Then I decided it was time to be on my way. Though the days were growing longer as spring approached, it was still dark before six o'clock in mid-March, and I turned on my headlights as I drove out of the parking lot. In their searching beams I caught a sudden glimpse of someone by the side of the road near the windmill. It wasn't till I was some distance away that I realized it had been Isaac Van Doran.

I slowed the car and made a U-turn in the road. By the time I returned to the spot, Van Doran had disappeared. There was no place he could have gone except into the windmill. Though much of the earlier snow had melted, the few flurries earlier in the day still clung to the grass. There was enough for me to trace his footprints leading up to the windmill door. I saw no other prints nearby.

Then, almost at once, I heard the scream. It was the drawn-out scream of a man who might have been falling from a great height—falling all the way to Hades itself. I burst through the door into an inferno of flame. Isaac Van Doran lay in the middle of it, trying to rise from the floor, stretching out his hand toward me. This time the flames were not confined to the body but seemed to fill the windmill's interior, shooting high into the mechanism above.

I tried to beat at the flames with my coat, but it was useless. With his dying screams still in my ears I was forced to retreat before the fire.

The town's fire engine came again, and Seeger and Bob Yale ran down from the hospital with some of the nurses. The whole scene could have been a duplicate of Sunday evening's, except this time there was no survivor. When the flames had finally been extinguished, they wrapped the blackened remains of Isaac Van Doran in canvas and carried the body away. Then the rest of us trooped up to the hospital and went into Seeger's office. "We'd better report this to Sheriff Lens," Seeger said, reaching for the telephone.

"As what? Another unexplained accident?" I asked.

Bob Yale looked at me. "You were there, Sam. What do you think it was?"

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"I'm damned if I know. We've had two fires, with one man badly injured and another dead. Both men were alone when it happened. Randy Collins entered the windmill because he thought he saw a glow of some sort. We don't know why Van Doran went in."

"You saw no one else around?"

I shook my head. "There were only Van Doran's footprints going in. And anyone hiding inside from earlier in the day would surely have been consumed by those flames. We have to face it—both men were alone in that windmill when they suddenly caught fire for no apparent reason."

"Did Van Doran manage to shout anything as he was dying?" Yale asked me.

"Just screams. If he thought it was the Devil he didn't say so."

Sheriff Lens drove out and talked to us, then went to look over the windmill as best he could in the dark. The electric wiring, undamaged in the first fire, was burnt out now, and everyone agreed a better inspection could be made in the morning. I went home to bed and dreamed of Isaac Van Doran's final moments in the fire, screaming and reaching out his hand toward a salvation I could not give him.

In the morning I drove back to the hospital. I parked my car in the gravel lot, and as I started down the hill toward the windmill Lincoln Jones intercepted me. "There's something I thought you'd want to know," he said.

"About last night?"

He nodded. "I gave Van Doran's body a cursory examination before it was removed. The man had a broken leg."

"What?"

"A compound fracture of the left tibia."

"You couldn't be mistaken?"

"The bone was protruding through the skin."

"I see. Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you said he walked into the windmill. He couldn't have, with that leg. You must have seen someone else."

I considered that. "Or Van Doran broke his leg after he was inside."

"During the fire? It was a pretty bad break to get from just falling down."

"Anyway, thanks for the information. It may be a big help." I left him and continued down the hill.

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Sheriff Lens was already on the scene, standing in the doorway. After this second fire the wooden floor was almost burned through in spots, and the display cases for the exhibits were all but consumed. Even the windmill mechanism above our heads was charred and unmoving. The wind shaft on which the outside vanes revolved had become jammed in the fire, freezing the blades in position. "Like a cross to keep away the Devil," Sheriff Lens observed, and his words surprised me. I'd never known him to be a particularly religious man.

"I want to go up there," I said, standing in the doorway and pointing above our heads at the blackened gears.

"What for?"

"Van Doran died with a broken leg. If he walked in here by himself he must have broken his leg here, in the instant the fire started. When I heard him scream I had the impression he might have been falling. Maybe I even heard him hit the floor without realizing it. And if he fell, it was from up there."

Sheriff Lens grunted. "I got another idea. The body was pretty badly burned, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Maybe Van Doran had injured someone else, broken his leg. When he saw you coming he returned here and set fire to the body, then managed to escape out one of the windows. The dead man might not be Van Doran at all."

"You've been reading those mystery novels again, Sheriff. There was only one set of prints coming in here. And I saw his face clearly in the flames before he died. I even dreamed of it last night. Besides, I would have seen anyone trying to climb out a window, even that high one over the wind shaft."

"Then the thing's impossible, unless you're telling me he committed suicide."

"I'm not telling you anything of the sort. But I do want to climb up there and take a look."

We got a ladder from the hospital groundskeeper and carried it over between us.

Sheriff Lens snorted as I lifted it into position. "If you need a ladder to get up there, Doc, how in hell you figger Van Doran got up there—flew?"

"He could have stood on one of the display cases." I went halfway up the ladder until I was within reaching distance of the blackened central wind shaft. Certainly nothing was hidden up here, and there

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was no sign of what had caused the fire. But over to one side, at the edge of the charred area, I did find something of interest.

A tiny piece of—what? rubber?—half melted from the heat and stuck to the wood. The unmelted part was red, which earlier had attracted my attention. But I couldn't for the life of me figure out what it had been. Had the killer hung from the roof by a giant rubber band that snapped him up out of sight when the fire started? No, I'd as soon believe in the Devil as in that idea.

I came back down the ladder. "Any luck, Doc?"

"Not much," I admitted.

"What now?"

"Let's go up to the hospital."

Bob Yale was in Seeger's office and he was just hanging up the telephone as we entered. "Mabel Foster's at it again. She was down in the town square creating a disturbance, warning people the Devil has come to Northmont. One of your deputies picked her up, Sheriff, and he's bringing her out here."

"Don't know what in hell we'll do with her," Seeger muttered.

I walked to the window and stared out at the windmill. "How's Collins coming along?"

"Better," Seeger said. "I think we can move him to Boston by the first of next week."

"His spirits are good," Yale added, confirming the diagnosis.

"The fire damaged your windmill," I said. "It doesn't turn any more."

"We can get that fixed," the hospital's director assured me.

I remembered something that Sheriff Lens had said. I had to think about it for a few moments, sorting it out in my mind, but then I was certain. "I know who did it," I told them.

"What?"

"I know who caused Randy Collins' injuries and then murdered Isaac Van Doran."

"Not the Devil?" Dr. Seeger asked with a slight smile.

"No, not the Devil. It was a very human killer." I started for the door. "Where's Lincoln Jones now?"

Yale glanced at the wall clock. "Probably up with Collins, changing the dressing on his burns."

"I'm going up there," I said, and though I didn't tell them to, the others trailed along.

Sara Jane was seated next to her husband's bed as we entered the room. Dr. Jones looked up from his task of spreading salve over the

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burned flesh and said, "I really don't know if it's good to have so many people in here at once."

"This is very important," I said. "I want to explain who caused Van Doran's death and how it was done."

Sara Jane came forward in her chair. "Was it the same person who did this to my husband?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

I leaned over the bed. "Shall I tell them, Randy? Shall I tell them who did this terrible thing to you and Isaac?"

"It was Satan," he rasped. "The Devil."

I shook my head. "No, it was only the Devil that dwells within each of us. You set fire to yourself, Randy. It was an accident, of course, but it was no accident when you sent Isaac Van Doran out to his death last evening."

They were all trying to talk at once, but it was Sara Jane's voice I heard above the rest. "What do you mean he set fire to himself? How could that be?"

"He was filling rubber balloons with small quantities of gasoline from a glass jug. The balloons were attached to a long fuse wound around the wind shaft up above. The gasoline ignited, breaking the jug and setting fire to his clothes. The wind shaft was turning at the time, and lifted some of the gasoline-filled balloons up out of the way of the fire."

"Why would Collins want to burn down the windmill?" Dr. Seeger asked, clearly unconvinced.

"He didn't want to burn the whole windmill," I explained. "Look out at it now, with those four vanes frozen in position. Sheriff Lens said it looked just like a cross, and it does. Randy Collins was going to burn a giant cross in front of this hospital because you hired a black doctor."

Lincoln Jones never looked up at my words. He kept on ministering to his patient as if none of this concerned him. Collins just lay there with his eyes closed as I hurried on. "The day the hospital opened and we had that scene with Mabel Foster, Seeger asked you, Randy, if you put Mabel up to it. Sara Jane wondered too if you were causing the disturbance. Even though they spoke in jest, I should have known from that—and from your conservative reputation—where you stood on hiring a black doctor at Pilgrim."

"The Ku Klux Klan has been active near here, burning crosses

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and so forth. Whether you're an active member or merely a KKK sympathizer, it must have struck you as fitting that the canvas-covered vanes of your windmill could be set afire for a cross burning. So you got a gallon jug of gasoline from Isaac's station. The idea, I suppose, was to attach the gasoline-filled balloons to the vanes of the windmill as they turned, then light the fuse and scoot away while the balloons burst and that flaming gasoline spread itself over the canvas. You were filling the balloons, letting the turning wind shaft carry them up above your head, when the accident happened."

"What about this business with the Devil?" Sheriff Lens asked.

"When it first happened, Randy didn't use the words *Devil* or *Satan*. He said *Lucifer,* though no one else including Mabel Foster used that name. Once he knew what he was saying, Randy's talk was of the Devil and fireballs. He didn't mention Lucifer any more either. But if he didn't mean the Devil when he first said it, what else could *Lucifer* have meant? What else is Lucifer a name for? Common friction matches.

"They're still called Lucifers by some people, and I know Randy used them because I saw a box at his home. He was simply telling us that a friction match accidentally ignited and caused the fire. But when he came to his senses and decided on a coverup—he changed Lucifer to the Devil."

"But Collins hasn't left his hospital bed," Bob Yale protested. "How was he able to kill Isaac Van Doran?"

"When I figured what must have happened to Randy, the rest was easy. After the first fire I found a piece of thick curved glass—not from the flat display cases, more like from a glass jug. That helped me, same as finding bits of rubber today helped me make a good guess about the balloons. If Randy brought the gasoline out in a glass jug, where'd he get it from? Only from Isaac Van Doran, who operates the town's only gas station.

"So what happened a few days after the fire, when Collins could have visitors? Van Doran comes to see him, at noon when Sara Jane's not around. How come, when the men have always been cool to one another? Because Van Doran knows damn well that Randy burned himself up somehow, with that gallon jug of gasoline he bought at Isaac's station." I turned to the man in the bed. "Van Doran came to blackmail you, didn't he, Randy?"

The eyes were still closed, but after a moment's silence he spoke. "Yeah, he wanted money. Said he'd tell them I was probably setting a fire with the gas. I told him where he could get money."

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The scorched lips twisted into a sort of smile.

"Of course!" The final piece of the puzzle dropped into place. "The old stories about money hidden in the windmill! You told him the money was there—where? In little balloons full of gold dust? Something like that, I suppose. You knew the fire hadn't consumed the gasoline-filled balloons already wrapped around the wind shaft. You knew you had to get rid of them somehow, before the gasoline leaked through or they were otherwise discovered. Because if they were found, everyone would realize what you were trying to do.

"So here was Van Doran presenting himself at your hospital bed. A man you already disliked because of the rumors about him and your wife. A man threatening blackmail. What better way to destroy the last evidence of your disastrous mistake? I suppose you told him where the money was supposed to be, told him to light a match or take a candle so he didn't need to turn on the windmill lights.

"Van Doran worked around gasoline every day, so he probably didn't even catch the odor of it when he climbed up there and lit his match. The fumes would have ignited, or one of the balloons would have burst. Whatever happened, Van Doran was immediately enveloped in flames and fell screaming to the floor, breaking his leg as he did so. Isaac Van Doran, and the evidence of the first fire, were destroyed together."

Sara Jane reached out her hand toward the man in the bed. "I can't believe it. Tell them it isn't true, Randy! Tell them!"

But he didn't say anything at all. He just lay there on the bed with his eyes closed, as if he couldn't stand the sight of the black doctor who was ministering to his wounded flesh.

"It was an odd sort of murder case," Dr. Sam Hawthorne continued, "difficult to prove in a court of law, since Randy Collins was helpless in a hospital bed at the time the victim died. They never did bring it to trial, but I guess he suffered enough anyway, what with all the operations to rebuild his body after the fire. They took him off to Boston and he never did come back, and I hear tell that Sara Jane finally left him and married someone else. It was the last of the trouble over Lincoln Jones, though, and over the years he proved to be one of the most popular doctors on the Pilgrim staff."

Dr. Sam got to his feet, leaning heavily on his cane. "Sorry you haven't time for another—ah—small libation. But come by again and I'll tell you about the boat on the lake, and our own miniature version of the *Mary Celeste* mystery."

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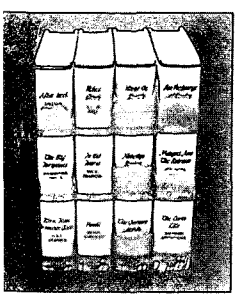

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